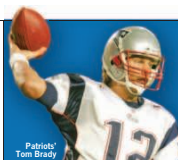


STARS AND STRIPES®

**Fun, festive
treats for
New Year's Eve**
Scene magazine



**Army honors
2 volunteers
with awards**
Page 3



**Patriots, Jets
still have a lot
to prove**
Back page

Volume 63, No. 252 © SS 2004 G

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 26, 2004

\$1.00

Rumsfeld visits with U.S. troops in Iraq

Marines capture senior al-Zarqawi rebels in wake of secretary's trip

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*No place like home
for the holidays*

Page 3



BEN MURRAY/Stars and Stripes

Spc. Jonathan Lucas of the 557th Medical Company kisses his 4-month-old daughter, Malia, after returning to Wiesbaden Army Airfield, Germany, from Iraq early in the morning on Christmas Eve. Friday's reunion marked the second time he has seen his baby. Lucas was one of about 100 members of the company who arrived home just in time for the holidays.

STARS & STRIPES

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News Tracker ... What's new with old news

States

Immigrant smuggling trial: Two men were convicted for their roles in a human smuggling attempt that ended in the deaths of 19 illegal immigrants crammed in a sweltering tractor-trailer, and could face life in prison.

Victor Jesus Rodriguez and Fredy Giovanni Garcia-Tobar were found guilty of the most serious charge, conspiracy, and 19 counts of aiding in the transport of immigrants that results in death.

"Clearly the jury has done its work," U.S. Attorney Michael Shelby said in a brief statement. "We will continue our efforts to finish the prosecution of this matter."

Federal prosecutors had accused the defendants of being members of a smuggling ring that stuffed a hot, airless tractor-trailer with more than 70 illegal immigrants and tried to transport them from South Texas to Houston in May 2003.

The trailer was abandoned at a truck stop near Victoria, about 100 miles southwest of Houston, after the immigrants began succumbing to the heat, estimated at 173 degrees. Seventeen immigrants were found dead inside the trailer. Two died later.

Judge Vanessa Gilmore asked jurors not to speak to the media because other trials in the case are pending. Of the 14 defendants indicted, five have pleaded guilty.

Cassini spacecraft probe: A probe once attached to the international Cassini spacecraft was on its own Saturday for the first time, headed on a slow, tumbling course into the hazy atmosphere of Saturn's planet-size moon Titan.

The European Space Agency's Huygens probe carried instruments that may reveal more about the moon's chemistry and whether Titan actually has lakes or seas of liquid methane and ethane that have been theorized by scientists.

Titan is the only moon in the solar system known to have a significant atmosphere. Rich with nitrogen and containing about 6 percent methane, the atmosphere is 1½ times thicker than Earth's.

With the Saturn system averaging about 890 million miles from the sun, Titan has a surface temperature of minus 290 degrees Fahrenheit.

Catholic clergy abuse: A Roman Catholic religious order has agreed to pay \$6.3 million to settle lawsuits brought by three former students who were sexually abused by counselors and teachers at an elite private school in the late 1970s and early 1980s.

The largest of the three settlements, at \$4 million, would be one of the biggest in California for a plaintiff in a clergy sexual abuse case, attorneys and victims advocates said Friday.

The abuse occurred when the plaintiffs, now in their 30s and 40s, attended the Concord school operated by the Christian Brothers religious order.

One man said a teacher molested him on a school-sponsored ski trip, and another said a counselor molested him at a retreat in Napa. The third man says another counselor repeatedly molested him during off-campus sessions. The order had transferred the abuser to Concord even though he was known to have had relationships with "sexual overtones" at another school, according to a 1968 letter from a Christian Brothers province leader. Cent the order turned over as part of the lawsuit.

World

Sudan peace agreement: The Sudanese government and the main southern rebel group, Sudan People's Liberation Army,



Grounded freighter: The two halves of the Selendang Ayu, a 738-foot freighter that ran aground Dec. 8, sit offshore of Unalaska Island, Ala. Commercial divers spent hours Friday in a futile search for the black box of a Coast Guard helicopter that crashed into the Bering Sea while trying to rescue the crew of the grounded Malaysian freighter. The divers planned another recovery attempt at the next break in the weather, expected Tuesday. The helicopter crashed with 10 people on board. Four were rescued by another helicopter, but six crewmembers were lost at sea and are presumed dead. The wreckage of the helicopter was later spotted washed ashore, covered with oil. Officials hope to recover the recorder to discover why the aircraft crashed.

will sign a peace agreement Jan. 10 in Kenya to end more than 20 years of civil war, a senior government official said Saturday.

Gutbi el-Mahdi, political adviser to President Omar el-Bashir, told the official Sudan Media Center that the government and SPLA negotiators decided to continue their talks during the Christmas and the New Year holidays and that the signing ceremony will be publicly celebrated both in Sudan's north and south.

"The final signing for peace will be on Jan. 10 in the presidential palace in Nairobi," Gutbi el-Mahdi, President Omar el-Bashir's political adviser told the SMC. On Thursday, President Bush signed legislation that authorizes financial support to help Sudanese victims of violence and as an incentive for reaching a final peace agreement with SPLA. The bill also encourages Bush to impose sanctions on Sudan's government if violence continues in Darfur or the peace talks collapse.

Afghan politics: The runner-up to Hamid Karzai in historic presidential elections congratulated the Afghan leader on Saturday on the formation of his Cabinet, and said he is in the process of forming an opposition political party.

Yunus Qanooni said he had deep respect for the Cabinet ministers and for Karzai himself — but that he felt he could best serve the nation by becoming a leading opposition figure. He said he would call the party New Afghanistan, and that it would be created in the coming weeks.

Qanooni, an ethnic Tajik who was a senior figure in the northern alliance and later served as Karzai's interior and education minister, got 16 percent of the vote in October elections. That was far behind Karzai but well ahead of a field of 15 other candidates.

International space station: An unmanned Russian cargo spaceship on a vital supply mission prepared Saturday to dock at the international space station, carrying food for the two-member U.S.-Russian crew, who have been forced to ration their dwindling supplies.

The Progress M-51 lifted off Friday from the Baikonur cosmodrome in the steppe of Kazakhstan and was set to moor at the station at 2:31 a.m. Moscow time Sunday.

The spaceship carries about 2.5 tons of food, water, fuel and research equipment for Russian cosmonaut Salizhan Sharipov and U.S. astronaut Leroy Chiao, who are in their second month on the station.

Russian and American space officials were alarmed earlier this month to learn that the two had gone through so much food on the station.

NASA officials have said there was enough food to last seven to 14 days beyond Dec. 25, but warned that the crew will be forced to return to Earth if Progress doesn't successfully dock at the station.

Afghan fighting: Suspected Taliban rebels attacked a government office in southern Afghanistan, prompting the military to kill one soldier and two militants dead, the governor said on Saturday. In other violence, an army truck driver was killed when rebels ambushed his convoy.

About 40 Taliban ambushed a government office in the Bagram district of southern Zabul province on Thursday, said Gov. Khail Mohammed. He said outgunned security forces held the rebels off, killing two of them. One soldier was also killed.

The rebels left the bodies of their fallen comrades but stole several vehicles, Mohammed said. He said reinforcements had been sent to the scene.

Meanwhile, rebels attacked an Afghan military convoy as it made its way from western Herat province to neighboring Farah, killing one driver and wounding two others, Farah's deputy police Hajib Mohammed Rassoud said on Saturday. He said the rebels set three of the trucks on fire, then fled.

Musharraf assassination attempt: A Pakistani soldier has been sentenced to death and another soldier given 10 years imprisonment after they were convicted in an attempt to assassinate President Gen. Pervez Musharraf, an army spokesman said Friday.

Other air force and army personnel are facing similar trials in military courts over last year's bomb attack, believed to have been plotted by a Libyan al-Qaida operative with help from Pakistani Islamic militants, Maj. Gen. Shaikat Sultan said.

Sultan did not identify the two convicted low-ranking army soldiers. He also did not give details of their involvement in the Dec. 14, 2003, attack, when a huge bomb ripped through a bridge seconds after Musharraf's motorcade passed in Rawalpindi, a garrison city close to the capital Islamabad. No one was hurt.

Stories and photos from The Associated Press

Qanooni



Three generations of Byrds are tearfully reunited early in the morning on Christmas Eve at Wiesbaden, where Spc. William Byrd Jr., left, of the 557th Medical Company (Ground Ambulance) receives a hug from his happy father, William Sr., while William III, foreground, looks on.

Christmas at home

Just in time, about 100 members of 557th Medical Company return to Wiesbaden for Iraq

BY BEN MURRAY
Stars and Stripes

WIESBADEN, Germany — Santa ditched the sled and the eight puny reindeer for a high-powered military plane Christmas Eve in order to deliver a load of imported holiday gifts wrapped in dusty desert camouflage, to Wiesbaden Army Airfield.

That's where family members and friends of soldiers in the 557th Medical Company (Ground Ambulance) waited eagerly in a hangar at 4 a.m. Friday, all but ignoring poor Santa when he did show up bearing candy canes and gift bags.

The dozens of wives and children had more important people to see, frankly, with their loved

ones just minutes away after almost a year of being deployed in Iraq.

Anna Curlee, a co-leader of the unit's family readiness group and whose husband is a captain in the 557th, said she asked 5-year-old daughter Jenna whom she was more excited to see on Christmas Eve, the man in the red suit or the one in the tan uniform.

Jenna told her "daddy coming home" was more exciting than Santa's arrival, Curlee said, in a story that was repeated several times that morning.

"My little boy said on the way here, 'It's the best Christmas present ever,'" said Elizabeth Vice, waiting for her husband, Sgt. William Vice.

Several wives said Friday that

the bustle of the holiday season served as a welcome distraction from counting down the hours to the day when the 557th would return.

Gilda Kling, rocking her young son Camryn, said the past three days "went fast — except for this hour."

A total of 109 members of the 557th returned to Wiesbaden on Friday, after spending more than 11 months performing the dangerous work of traveling with ground convoys, providing first-response medical care to troops hurt in ambushes, accidents and attacks. Two other members remain downrange to help bring back equipment.

The 557th's battalion commander, Lt. Col. Kyle Campbell,

showed visible pride when talking about the accomplishments of the soldiers, calling them "the best medics that the Army has to offer." Many of them are only 19 or 20 years old, he said, who have had the tough job of administering aid to men and women wounded in convoy attacks and rushing them to medical facilities.

The unit's 40 ambulances were "literally all over the place" in Iraq traveling with the convoys, where they evacuated 5,250 people and drove 179,000 miles of dangerous road without suffering a serious wound or battle death, Campbell said.

Their efforts, he said, helped provide reunions similar to the 557th's Christmas Eve gathering for countless other American families.

"No matter what your views are of the conflict or the war, that's amazing," Campbell said.

Another company of 121 medics under Campbell's command, the 45th Medical Company (Air Ambulance) returned just two days before the 557th, also without suffering a loss, after airlifting 3,823 soldiers to safety over the course of its deployment in Iraq, he said.

With the biggest and best gifts of the holiday season already taken care of for families of the 557th, several said they were planning to just take it easy over the next couple of days.

Asked what she and her husband were going to do with the kids over Christmas, Vice said, "Just hang out and be a family."

E-mail Ben Murray at: murrayb@mail.strips.osd.mil

Two-year-old Abigail Vice gets a good look at her father, Sgt. William Vice of the 557th Medical Company (Ground Ambulance), while the happy dad holds her and brother Yankton, 6, at Wiesbaden Army Airfield, Germany, on Friday. Vice came home with the 557th after nearly a year in Iraq.

PHOTOS BY BEN MURRAY/Stars and Stripes

Army recognizes work with families

BY JESSICA INIGO
Stars and Stripes

HEIDELBERG, Germany — In 1996, Kelly Gemin realized that, just by volunteering, she had the power to link the Army and its family members together in an understanding relationship.

She got out of the Army and, at the advice of a friend, attended her first Army Family Team Building meeting, though Gemin thought there wasn't anything a bunch of civilians could teach her about the Army after 12½ years of being in the service herself.

She found out she was wrong. Now, after eight years of volunteering, Gemin said she can't figure out where AFTB begins or ends in her life. She is focused on making Army families more knowledgeable, strong and able.

Gemin, who received one of three awards given in Germany at the first Department of the Army AFTB ceremony in South Carolina this month, said she was honored by the recognition.

Along with Gemin's Instructor of the Year Award for the 221st Base Support Battalion, the Wiesbaden community she volunteered in also earned the Medium Installation Program of the Year award and Candy Wojcikowski, an AFTB volunteer in the 41st BSB in Heidelberg, received the Instructor of the Year award for her community.

The new Army-level awards that came

after 10 years of AFTB operations were a surprise to the recipients, but Gemin said the work they do isn't for recognition — it's for the love of the program.

She explained that numerous studies indicate that soldier performance, readiness, and retention relate directly to family satisfaction with Army life. This satisfaction is gained through understanding and confidence, which AFTB provides through classroom instruction and on-line courses.

Gemin is one of these teachers, having made it to the top level as a core instructor.

When she arrived to Germany in December 2000, she worked just as hard as an AFTB volunteer in Wiesbaden as she did in her regular job at the commissary, spending nearly the same amount of hours with both tasks.

Now, Gemin has a permanent, paying position with the AFTB program in Hanau, where she lives. It is the only paying slot within AFTB, since it is a volunteer-led organization.

In her job as program manager, she collects statistics, selects candidates for the

master trainers and program managers courses and manages funds. The paid position helps give some continuity to the local AFTB programs, since volunteers come in and out of communities so quickly, Gemin explained.

Ricky Gibbons, chief of Army Community Service for the Installation Management Agency-Europe, which AFTB falls under, said the team building program is an integral part of each community.

"AFTB is a neat cycle that matures as we go along," Gibbons said, explaining that instructors are always learning new details of the military and training in better ways. "Having this, after 10 years, be the first culmination and we receive three out of the six major awards given is unbelievable," she said.

Every community AFTB program is slightly different, since instructors bring in their own stories and ideas, as well as offer specific snapshots of military communities in different areas.

For more information, or to join AFTB, go to www.armyfamilyteambuilding.org

E-mail Jessica Inigo at: inigoj@mail.strips.osd.mil



Gemin



Gibbons

Airman pulls two from river in Oklahoma

The Associated Press

TULSA, Okla. — An airman home on leave from basic training jumped into the frigid water of the Arkansas River to save a mother and her 2-year-old son after their car lost control and crashed.

It was a happy ending Thursday for Detuna Bills, 34, her young son and Joshua Johnson, who had just proposed marriage to his fiancée when he became part of a dramatic rescue.

Bills' car, which swerved to avoid hitting a pickup truck that had cut in from the front, crashed into the water. Johnson, 18, who saw the accident from his own car, jumped in after her. Johnson, who is training to work on ground radar in Biloxi, Miss., credited his Air Force training.

"That's all I was thinking is, 'I don't know who's in there or what, but I need to get them out,'" Johnson said. "I mean, they teach us really not to think — just to act. I just glad that child survived."

Bills had nothing but praise for her rescuers. "Despite a few bumps and bruises, we're both doing OK," she said. "It's a happy ending, and we're looking forward to a family Christmas."

And yes, Brittany Danielle Campbell accepted Johnson's marriage proposal.

"I'm very proud of him," the 19-year-old said. "It was amazing. He didn't even hesitate."

Rumsfeld surprises troops in Iraq

DOD secretary: Defeating the insurgency an Iraqi problem

By ROBERT BURNS

The Associated Press

BAGHDAD — After a bruising month at home, U.S. Defense Secretary Donald H. Rumsfeld clearly relished his surprise holiday visit with American troops in some of the most dangerous areas of Iraq.

In a Christmas Eve visit, he consoled wounded soldiers in Mosul, told the infantry in Tikrit that democracy requires perseverance, and bucked up battle-weary Marines in Fallujah.

Rumsfeld praised the troops and told them he believes they will defeat the insurgency that threatens the country. He dismissed "the naysayers and the doubters," saying "there have been such doubters 'throughout every conflict in the history of the world.'"

His main message over a four-city tour was quite different: that the insurgency has staying power and a seemingly endless supply of weapons, and the time has come for ordinary Iraqis to realize that they — not the Americans — will ultimately decide who prevails in this conflict.

Rumsfeld fielded friendly questions. One soldier raised his hand to say that despite well-publicized complaints of some troops over having to stay in the military beyond their enlistment or retirement dates, others accepted the hardship.

At each stop, Rumsfeld spent more time than he usually does to



U.S. Defense Secretary Donald H. Rumsfeld, on a surprise Christmas Eve visit, talks to Marines and sailors of Bravo Surgical Company, 1st Medical Battalion, 1st Force Service Support Group, I Marine Expeditionary Force, at their base in Fallujah, Iraq, on Friday.

political target in Washington among both Democrats and Republicans.

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Rumsfeld fielded friendly questions. One soldier raised his hand to say that despite well-publicized complaints of some troops over having to stay in the military beyond their enlistment or retirement dates, others accepted the hardship.

At each stop, Rumsfeld spent more time than he usually does to

mingle with individual soldiers and have his picture taken with them. He ate breakfast, lunch and dinner with the troops.

"What's in there?" he asked about a military-issue sandwich before accepting it and sitting down to eat with the troops. At later food stop in Baghdad, he seemed more certain of his selection: He requested a slice of ham.

Rumsfeld greeted soldiers of the 1st Infantry Division in Tikrit and Marines at their main base outside the city of Fallujah, the scene of intense combat last month. Three Marines were killed in Fallujah just hours before Rumsfeld arrived.

The defense secretary zipped across the country in a Black Hawk helicopter flying at treetop

level and escorted by Apache attack helicopters. He arrived first in Mosul in pre-dawn darkness, visiting with soldiers wounded in Tuesday's apparent suicide attack on a mess tent.

Rumsfeld ended his day in Baghdad, meeting with top American commanders and holding talks with Iraq's interim president, Ghazi al-Yawar, who told Rumsfeld that he shared the Bush administration's optimism about establishing a stable Iraqi democracy.

The Pentagon shrouded Rumsfeld's trip in unusual secrecy out of concern for security.

Just hours after Rumsfeld left Baghdad, a gas tanker truck wired with explosives blew up in the city, killing one person and wounding 19.

U.S. deaths in Iraq

The Associated Press

As of Friday, Dec. 24, 2004, at least 1,323 members of the U.S. military have died since the beginning of the Iraq war in March 2003, according to an Associated Press count. At least 1034 died as a result of hostile action, the Defense Department said. The figures include three military civilians. The AP count is seven higher than the Defense Department's tally, last updated at 10 a.m. EST Thursday. There has not been an update thus far Friday.

The British military has reported 75 deaths; Italy, 19; Poland, 16; Spain, 11; Ukraine, nine; Bulgaria, seven; Slovakia, three; Estonia, Thailand and the Netherlands, two each; and Denmark, El Salvador, Hungary and Latvia one death each.

Since May 1, 2003, when President Bush declared that major combat operations in Iraq had ended, 1,185 U.S. military members have died, according to AP's count. That includes at least 925 deaths resulting from hostile action, according to the military's numbers.

The latest deaths reported by the military:

■ No new deaths reported. The latest identifications reported by the Defense Department.

Killed Tuesday in an attack on a mess hall near Mosul Iraq:

■ Army Pfc. Lionel Ayro, 22, Jeanerette, La.; assigned to the 73rd Engineer Company, 1st Brigade, 25th Infantry Division, Fort Lewis, Wash.

■ Army Spc. Jonathan Castro, 21, Corona, Calif.; assigned to the 73rd Engineer Company, 1st Brigade, 25th Infantry Division, Fort Lewis, Wash.

■ Army Spc. Cory M. Hewitt, 26, Stewart, Tenn.; assigned to the 705th Ordnance Company, Fort Polk, La.

■ Army Capt. William W. Jacobsen Jr., 31, Charlotte, N.C.; assigned to the 1st Battalion, 24th Infantry Regiment, 1st Brigade, 25th Infantry Division, Fort Lewis, Wash.

■ Army Staff Sgt. Robert S. Johnson, 23, Castro Valley, Calif.; assigned to the 1st Battalion, 21st Infantry Regiment, 1st Brigade, 25th Infantry Division, Fort Lewis, Wash.

■ Army Staff Sgt. Julian S. Melo, 47, New York; assigned to the 1st Battalion, 24th Infantry Regiment, 1st Brigade, 25th Infantry Division, Fort Lewis, Wash.

■ Army Staff Sgt. Maj. Robert D. O'Dell, 38, Manassas, Va.; assigned to the United States Army Intelligence & Security Command, Fort Belvoir, Va.

■ Army Spc. David A. Ruhen, 20, Stafford, Va.; assigned to the Army National Guard's 1st Cavalry Division, West Point, Va.

■ Army Staff Sgt. Darren D. VanKomen, 33, Bluefield, W.Va.; assigned to the 2nd Squadron, 14th Cavalry Regiment, 1st Brigade, 25th Infantry Division, Fort Lewis, Wash.

Marines capture senior al-Zarqawi militants

By BASSEM MIROUE

The Associated Press

BAGHDAD — The U.S. military said Saturday it has captured two senior terrorists linked to Iraq's most feared Islamic militant group as police uncovered more bodies under the rubble after a day after a suicide bomber blew up a gas tanker in an upscale Baghdad district.

The two detainees linked to Jordanian terrorist Abu Musab al-Zarqawi's al-Qaida in Iraq network were identified as Saleh Arayaghani and Bassim Mohammed Hazem.

"Both of these individuals are cell leaders for a local Zarqawi-affiliated terrorist group that is operating" in the western province of Anbar that include the cities of Ramadi and Fallujah, U.S. Marines said in a statement.

Al-Zarqawi's group recently changed its name to al-Qaida in Iraq and pledged allegiance to Osama bin Laden's al-Qaida network. It has claimed responsibility for numerous deadly attacks against U.S. troops and government forces.

No group has yet claimed responsibility for the gas truck explosion Friday night in the upscale Mansour district near the Libyan and

Moroccan embassies, which killed at least nine people and demolished several houses. Police said it was a suicide attack.

Rescuers on Saturday uncovered seven more bodies under the rubble of one of the shattered houses. At least 14 people were seriously wounded by the blast which struck just hours after U.S. Defense Secretary Donald H. Rumsfeld left the capital following an unannounced one-day visit to Iraq.

There were no members of the multinational forces among the casualties. There were no injuries inside the embassies.

The Marine statement announcing the arrest of the suspected extremists said al-Zarqawi's cell "kidnapped and executed 11 Iraqi National Guardsmen," carried out car bombings and other attacks in the Ramadi area and "smuggled foreign terrorists into the country."

Violence has escalated across Iraq in the run-up to national elections scheduled for Jan. 30.

While majority Shiites have embraced the polls as a chance to assert their numerical strength, radical elements within the minority Sunni community are leading the campaign to prevent the vote.

In other violence Saturday, a car bomb exploded as a U.S. military convoy was passing through the southern town of Ein al-Nus, killing three Iraqis and wounding two, police said.

Gunnmen shot dead Hasan Abdul-Ghani al-Rubai, a professor at Baghdad University's medical school.

And a roadside bomb exploded Saturday near the car of the governor of eastern Diyala province, wounding four of his guards, officials said.

Governor Abdullah Rashid al-Jouri was unhurt by the blast in the town of Khan Bani Saad, halfway between Baquba and Baghdad, said Dr. Abdullah Mohammed of the Baquba General Hospital.

Meanwhile, Iraqi police have arrested a group of six men suspected to have organized last week's explosions in the Shiite holy city of Najaf that killed more than 50 people.

More displaced residents of the battered city of Fallujah returned to inspect their devastated homes Saturday.

On Thursday and Friday, a total 1,404 residents returned to their homes in the Andalus district of Fallujah under the supervision of government and U.S. forces, a Marine statement said.

Army Guard seeking to boost recruitment

To reverse a sharp drop in recruiting since citizen soldiers became 40 percent of U.S. ground forces in Iraq, the Army National Guard and Army Reserve this month announced increases in enlistment and re-enlistment bonuses.

But in an interview for this column, Lt. Gen. H. Steven Blum, chief of the National Guard Bureau, said the Army "probably is two years away" from moving to shorter tours for members deployed to Iraq and Afghanistan. Yearlong combat tours, he conceded, aggravate the recruiting problem.

"I would like to get to a rotation where we do nine months active duty tour time with six months boots-on-the-ground," said Blum. That would cut current rotations by half.

"But we are not ready to go there yet," Blum said.

The chief of Army Reserve, Lt. Gen.

MILITARY UPDATE

Tom Philpott

James R. Helmly, told The Dallas Morning News in mid-December that Reserve recruiting is in a "precipitous decline" that, if not stemmed, could reopen debate over a military draft.

Blum, in our interview, said Guard recruiting has dropped sharply, particularly from among the pool of members leaving active duty. Before fiscal 2004, the Army Guard got 50 percent of recruits from the prior-service pool.

"It was an automatic. It was given," said Blum.

That has plummeted to 35 percent, he said, leaving the Guard short more than 8,000 members through September. The gap has widened since then to 12,600. Army Guard recruiters in October and November, the first two months of fiscal 2005, signed only 70 percent of their monthly goals.

Blum said it reflects a dramatic change in the nature of Guard service since Sept. 11, 2001, from a strategic reserve force that drilled on weekends to an operational force critical to a nation at war. One quarter of Guard personnel have been deployed, continually, for the past three years, he said.

Blum, in pressing for shorter combat tours, points out that a yearlong stint in Iraq or Afghanistan means far more than a year away from family and civilian jobs for reserve component members.

"The active guy goes back to his job — at Fort Campbell, Fort Lewis, wherever — and gets assimilated right back into his life. The National Guard [member] has already spent

three or four months in a MOB [mobilization] station before a year boots-on-the-ground. So it's not really a year. It's 16 months. Then, it's another two months from the time they leave theater until they leave active duty for about an 18-month interruption of their civilian life, civilian job and civilian education."

"We're not complaining about it," he said "but I want truth in lending."

For now, Blum said, he's optimistic that more recruiters and bigger bonuses will attract enough volunteers to return the Guard to full strength.

"We're sustaining wartime casualties and sending people in harm's way. So it requires us to recruit with a different message. We're not bringing people in for college [benefits] or vocational training. We're bringing them in for service to their nation," Blum said. "And their state."

To comment, write Military Update, P.O. Box 231111, Centerville, VA 20121-1111. E-mail: updates@aol.com or visit www.militaryupdate.com

Louisiana National Guard unit suffers its 1st lost

BY JOSEPH GORDONO

Stars and Stripes

CAMP COOKE, Iraq — A Louisiana National Guard infantry battalion has suffered its first combat death in Iraq, the Pentagon confirmed Saturday.

First Lt. Christopher W. Barnett, of the 1st Battalion, 156th Infantry Regiment, 256th Brigade Combat Team, was killed by a roadside bomb Thursday on the outskirts

of Baghdad, a Department of Defense release said.

The incident occurred before 8 a.m. Thursday and is under investigation, officials said.

Barnett, 32, was from Baton Rouge, La.

The death hit the close-knit unit, known as Tiger Brigade and largely based out of Camp Liberty, especially hard because it came so close to Christmas. According to the Shreveport Times, Barnett's friends

and family in Livingston Parish were deeply saddened by the news.

"Chris was a wonderful, happy man who loved to cut up," Tina McCormick, whose son Timothy is also a lieutenant in Barnett's unit, told the paper. McCormick grieved by looking at photographs of Barnett and her son together before they headed to Iraq, "looking forward to where they were going," the paper quoted her as saying.

Funeral details for Barnett are pending,

the newspaper reported. Officials from the 256th are planning a memorial service in Iraq.

The 256th Brigade Combat Team was the first unit to arrive in Iraq for Operation Iraqi Freedom III, as the Pentagon calls the third large-scale rotation of troops to the country. Another battalion attached to the 256th, the 1st Battalion, 69th Infantry from New York, has suffered four deaths so far in its yearlong tour.

E-mail: Joseph.Gordon@pstrips.osd.mil

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Meet the Fockers

Now that Greg Focker is "in" with his soon-to-be-in-laws, Jack and Dina Byrnes, it looks like smooth sailing for him and his fiancée, Pam. But that's before Pam's parents meet Greg's parents, the Fockers. The hyper-relaxed Fockers and the tightly-wound Byrnes are woefully mismatched from the start, and no matter how hard Greg and Pam try, there is just no bringing their families together—which all adds up to a disastrously funny time of "getting to know you."

Starring Robert De Niro, Ben Stiller, Dustin Hoffman, Barbra Streisand



PG-13 PARENTS STRONGLY CAUTIONED
Some Material May Be Inappropriate for Children Under 13

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Meet the FOCKERS

Show dates are approximate. Check your local theater or aaes.com for exact show dates and times.

Adams	18-24 Feb
Arlene	11-17 Feb
Babenhansen	11-17 Feb
Bald	7-13 Jan
Barnett	14-20 Jan
Baumholder	23 Jan-3 Feb
Bitburg	11-17 Feb
Camp Doha	28 Jan-3 Feb
Darmstadt	18-24 Feb
Desheim	21-27 Jan
Friedberg	18-24 Feb
Giebelstadt	4-10 Feb
Grafenwohr	14-20 Jan
Hannau	7-13 Jan
Heidelberg	14-20 Jan
Hohenfels	21-27 Jan
Ilseheim	4-10 Feb
Kaltenbach	28 Jan-3 Feb
Kitzingen	28 Jan-3 Feb
Kosovo	18-24 Feb
Lakenheath	14-20 Jan
Livorno	25 Feb-3 Mar
Manheim	7-13 Jan
Mildenhall	7-13 Jan
Ramstein Hercules	21-27 Jan
Ramstein Nightingale	14-20 Jan
Rhein Main	28 Jan-3 Feb
Schweinfurt	21-27 Jan
Spangdahlem	4-10 Feb
Taxla	4-10 Mar
Villingen	21-27 Jan
Vienna	18-24 Feb
Vilseck	7-13 Jan
Vogelweh	7-13 Jan
Wiesbaden	14-20 Jan
Wuerzburg	7-13 Jan



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At Balad Air Base, it's service on the run

Incoming planes outgoing in a matter of minutes

By RON JENSEN

Stars and Stripes



PHOTOS BY RON JENSEN/Stars and Stripes

Senior Airman Roberto Vasquez of the 332nd Expeditionary Logistics Readiness Squadron (Aerial Port Flight) uses green glow sticks to guide a cargo loader to a C-17 aircraft ramp Sunday night at Balad Air Base, Iraq.



Airmen of the 332nd Expeditionary Logistics Readiness Squadron unload a C-17 cargo plane Sunday night at Balad Air Base. Because of the possibility of attack, the planes sometimes are unloaded in eight minutes.

When the plane stops, someone jumps on the opened ramp and begins signaling the K-loader to approach. Others climb aboard and, with the help of the aircraft crew, prepare the pallets for movement. As one machine moves away from the ramp with a load, another slips in.

Observers of this flight line "Swan Lake" have to watch closely. The curtain falls in little more

"To us, it's like a ballet. It's all choreographed."

Tech. Sgt. Todd Lunge

"We always try to get them turned as quickly as we can, safely," said Capt. Rob Neal, the flight commander.

The team can unload a cavernous C-17 Globemaster, one of the largest planes in the inventory, in about a third of the time it takes at most stateside bases. Airman 1st Class Thomas Hill said,

"Average, I would say eight minutes, compared to a normal time of 30 to 35 minutes back home," at Dover Air Force Base, Del., Hill said.

The chase is quite exciting to watch.

The aircraft — be it a C-130 Hercules, a C-141 Starlifter or a C-5 Galaxy — lands and taxis to a spot under the direction of Detachment 5, 721st Air Mobility Operations Group.

Airmen react to the plane with one or more K-loaders, the flat self-propelled vehicles on which the aircraft's load is placed, or forklifts, whichever is required.

"To us, it's like a ballet. It's all choreographed," Tech. Sgt. Todd Lunge said. "I like just watching it sometimes."

than the blink of an eye. The air-planes engines run the whole time airmen remove the cargo. The Air Force calls this an engine running offload.

And although there is no instant replay if you miss it, there's always another aircraft right behind.

"A lot of times, we're running from one plane to another," Airman Derik Pitts said.

Hill remembered when four C-17s, two C-5s and three C-130s landed within a few minutes of each other. The race began anew.

That's another difference from back home. At Dover and other stateside bases, the planes have some idea of when to expect an aircraft.

"Here," Hill said, "they just drop out of the sky."

"First come, first served," Pitts said.

It is hard to compare them with other aerial ports in the Air Force.

No one really keeps track of such things, but Charleston Air Force Base, S.C., and Dover are considered the busiest.

"I can guarantee you, we're a lot busier than Charleston," Neal said. Plus, he said, he has a fraction — perhaps a quarter — of the people back home.

Lunge said, however, that the effort can get out of hand. That's when injuries occur.

"One at a time," he said. "That's what I tell them. We don't take safety for granted."

There's another hitch in the effort. Occasionally, Iraqi insurgents fire a mortar shell or rocket from beyond the wire, interrupting the loading process.

"We're all out here and — 'Boom! What was that?'" Lunge said.

Work stops, of course, and "everybody runs for cover," Neal said.

Because of the attacks, the aircraft crews don't like to dawdle. Their aircraft make large, inviting targets.

Some aircraft are often airborne again 21 minutes after landing, Neal said, meaning the aerial port flight at Balad has some very appreciative customers.

"Oh yes, they care," he said. "It's like the flying crews. 'They like it. They like the work we do.'"

E-mail Ron Jensen at: jensenr@mail.estripes.osd.mil

Airmen become jacks-of-all-trades when servicing aircraft at Balad

BALAD AIR BASE, Iraq — The airmen of Detachment 5, 721st Air Mobility Operations Group are like parking attendants.

They marshal the aircraft at Balad to the right spot on the ramp for unloading. Then they guide them out for takeoff.

It's a pretty standard Air Force task, said Maj. Grant Izi, the detachment commander, who is stationed at Guam.

"The mission is a little different in that the aircraft don't stay on the ground very long," he said.

For example, he said, a C-17 Globemaster might spend two or three hours at Ramstein Air Base, Germany, home of the 721st AMOG headquarters.

"Normally, [at Balad] a C-17 is on the ground only 30 minutes or so," said Izi. "It's a very high volume, fast-paced ramp out here. I've never seen a pace like this."

He sees more C-5 Galaxies in Balad in one week, he said, than he sees in Guam in one month.

Plus, he said, his airmen handle 16 different types of military and civilian aircraft, more than they would see just about anywhere.

The airmen also perform standard checks and needed maintenance on the planes to get them airborne again.

"I have many different flavors of personnel," he said of the nearly 40 people in the detachment. "I have F-15 guys, C-130 guys. I have F-16 guys. Of course, C-5, C-17 and the last of the C-141 guys and gals."

The C-141 Starlifter was phased out of active-duty service in September but is still used by some Air National Guard and Reserve units.

One of Izi's guys is Staff Sgt. Jason Harrell, an

F-15 crew chief stationed at Elmendorf, Alaska. Since arriving at Balad, he has guided and worked on more aircraft than ever before in his six-year Air Force career.

"It's an experience I never could have gotten [anywhere else]," Harrell said. "I'll probably never mess with some of them ever again."

Although the detachment includes personnel with skills for nearly every military aircraft — they don't touch the civilian planes — some people were cross-trained to handle tasks outside their specialty.

Some learn to refuel various aircraft, others to replenish the oxygen tanks. Still others learn how to tow aircraft they've never towed before.

Like everyone at Balad and the adjoining Logistics Support Area Anaconda, the airmen of the 721st AMOG have to deal with rocket and mortar attacks.

"When we hear the red alert, we have to get everybody off the ramp," Harrell said. After an attack, they must search the flight line and ramp for any unexploded ordnance.

The attacks notwithstanding, Harrell said, the airmen feel like they are part of the fight to clear Iraq of insurgents. The cargo they're bringing to the country is directly related to that effort.

"I feel I am [helping out]," he said. "I'm sure everybody does. I hope they do."

Izi said he knows his airmen feel a part of the fight. He has seen them volunteer to load patients onto the medical evacuation flights leaving the base regularly.

"If nothing else does," he said, "that grabs you."

— Ron Jensen



AP photos

Above: Children play in the snow Dec. 15 in Santa's village on the Arctic Circle in Rovaniemi, Finland, which lays claim tongue-in-cheek to his log cabin there. Finland was horrified when a British family went public with complaints that he gave them the brushoff. And then there's the larger question of whether Santa may lose his magic as his haunt becomes a tourist attraction drawing hundreds of thousands of visitors.

Right: Santa talks with children in his village.



Santa's magic tested in his hometown

Famed tourist village in Finland realizes challenges of St. Nick business

BY MATTI HUHTANEN

The Associated Press

SANTA'S VILLAGE ON THE ARCTIC CIRCLE — Santa Claus takes a long look at two English children sitting on his knees.

"Have you been good?" he asks gently.

The question might well be thrown back in his bushy-bearded face, considering the fuss a British family caused this month by complaining that they spent a fortune to come to Santa's village on the Arctic Circle, only to be given the brushoff.

Hilary Hughes, who brought two daughters and four grandchildren to visit Santa, claimed to the Guardian newspaper in London that they were told he was too busy to see them, then finally received them in a dining room cluttered with dirty plates.

Finns, highly sensitive about their nation's image, were horrified, and tabloid newspapers passionately bemoaned the damage to Santa's prestige. "This was most unfortunate, and we can only apologize profusely," lamented Jyrki Niemi, manager of the firm that arranged the trip.

He blamed a delayed flight, adding: "We had 1,600 guests that weekend, and there were no other complaints. Everything else went smoothly."

But the flap may be just a symptom of a deeper concern that the Christmas spirit is getting lost as the Santa industry gets bigger and more regimented.

The Finns always have claimed a special relationship with Santa, and since the 1960s the idea that Santa's home is in Lapland has been strongly promoted by travel agents, the government and Finnair, the national carrier, which calls itself Santa's official airline.

Tourism took off in 1985 when Santa's first workshop opened here, 520 miles north of Helsinki, the capital.

Since then, millions have flown in to sit on Santa's knee, ride reindeer sleds and snowmobiles, and visit the husky farms that dot the snowy landscape. Some 600,000 are expected this year, with more than 250 chartered flights this month alone arriving in Rovaniemi, the capital of Finnish Lapland 5 miles south of Santa's village.

That's 25 percent more than last year.

To get all those multitudes off the plane, onto Santa's knee, around the attractions and out again calls for clockwork timing.

"There is a danger we will be swamped by the growing numbers, so we have to be very careful when we plan," said Niemi. "Quality must come before quantity."

Santa's log cabin, originally built for a visit by Eleanor Roosevelt, widow of the U.S. president, is now dwarfed by Santa's Office and workshops, the Santa post office that receives more than 500,000 letters a year from all over the world, and dozens of souvenir stores.

Then there's SantaPark, a deep cave where visitors can listen to the sounds of Lappish nature and throw frozen snowballs, and a bar where drinks are served from ice glasses at a room temperature of 14 degrees Fahrenheit.

At the newly opened Santa's Technology Park, companies work in tourism and communication technology, including answering Santa's letters and making DVDs about Santa and Lapland.

And of course, Rovaniemi boasts a Hotel Santa Claus. In fact, three quarters of the work force in the town of 35,000 directly or indirectly services the \$460 million annual tourism industry.

Has the Santa business gotten too big?

No one will say so on the record for fear of hurting their own livelihood. But privately, some are worried. One waitress fears that "Santa saturation" — tourists are shunted in and out as though on conveyor belts — ultimately will cause a backlash.

In his quiet, cozy grotto, Santa won't be drawn into the debate.

His real identity is a secret and he won't answer questions about himself. His unchanging message is the well-being of children.

"It's nice that children can have lovely presents, but the most important thing is that they should be made to feel secure and happy," Santa said. "In this way, we can all have a better, safer world."

And for 8-year-old Guy Johnson from England, the magic is still very much there.

Santa is serious business in Finland

Some 600,000 visitors will visit Santa's Village in the northern reaches of the country.



The Santa he met in London wasn't the real thing, he said knowingly after meeting Finland's Santa. "This is the real Santa. He lives here. He was fantastic."

Across the globe, 'pagan' pines caught in church-state disputes

BY WILLIAM J. KOLE

The Associated Press

VIENNA, Austria — Pity the humble Christmas tree — a lovable shrub with heathen roots that's been dragged into the middle of bitter church-state separation squabbles stretching from France to Florida.

Historians say the Tannenbaum dates to the Druids of northern Europe, who lived several centuries before Christ and used pine boughs to mark the winter solstice. Even some evangelical Christians,

acknowledging its pagan past, jokingly refer to their trees as "Babylon bushes."

But because of the central role the Christmas tree plays in modern celebrations, others insist it's a de-facto religious symbol that has no place in schools or other public buildings.

Humburg, says David J. Robson, a U.S. horticulturist who has researched the tree's storied past and contends the only thing religiously authentic about it is the star or angel that's perched on top.

"It's not a Christian symbol per se,"

Robson, who works with the University of Illinois' extension service in Springfield, said in an interview. "It hasn't done anything wrong. It doesn't have the ability to do anything except bring some joy and keep the soil from eroding before it's cut down."

In France, the "sapin de Noel" has become the focal point of a lively debate over where it does and doesn't belong.

A dozen students at a high school east of Paris, convinced that a Christmas tree their principal put up in the entry hall vio-

lates a law banning conspicuous religious symbols in public schools, have pressured administrators to remove it.

In Florida, a furor over whether Christmas trees are unacceptable religious symbols ended last week when officials reversed a decision to restrict their display in public buildings.

U.S. courts have ruled that Christmas trees are secular symbols, although some have decreed that putting them up in public places gives other groups the right to place a holiday symbol in the same place.



French urban climber Alain Robert, aka the French Spiderman, scales the Taipei 101 building, the tallest building in the world, Saturday in Taipei, Taiwan. The Christmas Day climb opened a week of media events leading up to the official inauguration of the 101-story building on New Year's Eve.

Man scales world's tallest building

The Associated Press

TAIPEI, Taiwan — A French urban climber who calls himself Spiderman climbed to the top of the world's tallest building on Saturday — Taipei 101.

Alain Robert, 42, took almost four hours to reach the top of the 1,679-foot building. The climb took him nearly twice as long as he had expected, partly because of dreary weather.

Although he's climbed many of the world's tallest structures without the use of a rope, he climbed with one on Saturday, likely because of the wind and rain.

He paused to rest every eighth floor and even chatted with the president of Taipei 101 before tackling the final stretch.

As dark clouds drifted around the top, Robert climbed onto the roof with a tired smile. "It was very wet ... and there was a strong wind," he said.

Robert has also scaled the Eiffel Tower and more than 30 skyscrapers around the world, including New York's Empire State Building in 1994 and the Petronas Twin Towers in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, in 1997.

The Christmas Day climb opened a week of media events leading up to the official inauguration of Taipei 101 on New Year's Eve. The building houses office space and an observatory. A shopping mall at the base of the tower opened last year.

The 101-story skyscraper is 184 feet taller than the previous record-holder, the Petronas Towers. Taipei 101 also claims to have the highest structural top, the tallest roof and the highest occupied floor.

It also has two of the world's fastest elevators, which travel 55 feet per second and can go from the ground floor to the 89th in 39 seconds.



Robert displays a Taipei 101 flag as he stands on the top of the building. Robert, 42, took almost four hours to reach the top of the 1,679-foot building — nearly twice as long as he expected — because of the rain.

Abbas begins his run for president, pledges statehood

BY RAVI NESSMAN
The Associated Press

RAMALLAH, West Bank — Cloaking himself in Yasser Arafat's legacy, interim Palestinian leader Mahmoud Abbas opened his campaign for president Saturday with a pledge to fulfill Palestinian dreams of statehood.

Abbas, the front-runner in the Jan. 9 election, called on Israel to end its occupation of the West Bank, Gaza Strip and east Jerusalem — areas that Israel captured in the 1967 Mideast War. He said he favors a negotiated settlement and promised to respect the rights of Palestinian refugees.

Israel and the Palestinians both claim Jerusalem as their capital.

"We are choosing the path of peace and negotiation," Abbas added. "If there is no peace here, there will be no peace in the Middle East or the rest of the world."

Abbas, who faces six opponents in the presidential vote, is the candidate of Arafat's ruling Fatah movement. He repeatedly made clear he intends to present himself as the late Palestinian leader's heir, despite their often rocky relationship.

Since Arafat's death Nov. 11, Abbas has sought to harness Arafat's popularity to build support.

Abbas' rally began with a moment of silence for Arafat and he sprinkled his speech with references to the late leader.

Abbas also appeared alongside Arafat in campaign posters and advertisements that ran prominently in Palestinian newspapers Saturday. "On your path, we will achieve the Palestinian dream," the ads say.

In his speech, Abbas reiterated

previous promises to hold parliamentary elections in the first half of 2005, shortly after the January presidential race.

The militant group Hamas welcomed Abbas' call for elections, but urged him to follow through on the promise.

Hamas, which is popular at the local level, made a surprisingly strong showing in municipal elections this week, and could be poised to do well in the legislative vote as well.

The group is boycotting the presidential vote.

As the campaign kicked off, Palestinian newspapers were full of advertisements from presidential hopefuls. Human-rights worker Mustafa Barghouti, who is running a distant second to Abbas in opinion polls, appeared on the front page of the al-Ayyam daily and had billboard ads throughout the West Bank.

"Put the cause in safe hands," the candidate says in one ad, a picture of Jerusalem's Dome of the Rock mosque in the background.

Late Friday, Abbas traveled to the West Bank town of Bethlehem to join Christmas celebrations, where he was greeted by cheering crowds.

It was the first time a Palestinian leader was permitted to go to the biblical town for Christmas since 2000. Israel prevented Arafat from attending the celebration in recent years, accusing him of advocating violence.

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Swiss philanthropists give millions to keep Saint Bernards on the job

BY ALEXANDER G. HIGGINS
The Associated Press

GENEVA — Swiss philanthropists are giving more than \$4 million to keep the famed Saint Bernard rescue dogs working on the mountain pass that gave them their name, a key advocate said Friday.

Monks of the Congregation of Canons of the Great Saint Bernard have kept the dogs in their mountain monastery since about 1660.

However, the monks said in October that maintaining the kennels had become too much of a financial burden.

Rudolf Thomann, president of the Swiss Saint Bernard Club, said two foundations were being

created to care for the dogs and build a museum in their honor. The canines are credited with having saved some 20,000 travelers over the past 200 years.

One of the new organizations will buy nearly 20 dogs from the order, probably at the end of January, Thomann said in a telephone interview. The dogs will continue to winter in a kennel in Martigny, a city in the valley below the Grand Saint Bernard Pass, and take turns in the monastery during the summer, he said.

The foundation, which also will buy the kennel building in Martigny, is to be named for Barry, the famous Saint Bernard that lived in the monastery from 1800 to 1812 and helped save more than 40 people.

The Barry of the Great Saint Bernard Foundation will be created Jan. 28 with \$656,000 donated by Christine Cerletti, a singer based in the northern Swiss city of Basel, Thomann said.

He said the foundation would partner with a second one created Thursday by former Geneva private banker Bernard de Watteville and his wife, Caroline. De Watteville said he would donate at least \$3.5 million, Thomann said.

The Saint Bernard's strong adaptability to different climates, its stamina, double fur coat and extraordinary sense of smell and hearing made it ideal for Alpine rescue.

Now the dogs' work is largely performed with the aid of helicopters and heat sensors.

IN THE STATES

Rare white Christmas as winter storms rage

The Associated Press

Folks in Victoria, Texas, just off the Gulf Coast, weren't dreaming Saturday when they woke up to a white Christmas. They had one — the first in 86 years.

Almost a foot of snow fell overnight to give Victoria a taste of what the country's midsection has been dealing with the past two days: winter weather.

An arctic front that swept through the Midwest hit Indiana and Kentucky particularly hard, bringing record snowfalls that startled holiday travel and stopped last-minute Christmas shoppers in their tracks. More than a dozen traffic deaths and thousands of auto accidents have been blamed on the storm so far.

The last time Victoria saw a measurable amount of snow was 1913, when a tenth of an inch fell. That's the same amount that fell on Christmas 1918, said Tony Merriman, a meteorologist with the National Weather Service.

With the exception of South Texas and some air passengers in Philadelphia, things were starting to look up late Friday.

A portion of Interstate 64 in Indiana reopened, a day after more than 100 stranded travelers were rescued from their snowbound vehicles. But the road was still treacherous because of hundreds

of abandoned vehicles along a 25-mile stretch near the Illinois line.

In Normal, Ill., wind chill readings below zero compelled Epiphany Catholic Church to warn the camel, goats and sheep in its live Nativity scene with king-size electric blankets. The wise men, Mary and Joseph were given battery-powered heaters to carry in their pockets, and Jesus was played by a doll instead of a baby.

With frigid temperatures forecast for Ohio on Saturday, some 275,000 homes and businesses remained without power two days after the storm hit.

In Alaska, a different storm stranded motorists for nearly a day on a remote highway blanketed by snow drifts as high as 7 feet.



Diane Glynn throws freshly scraped snow off the windshield of her car late Friday night in Brownsville, Texas. Jason Straub of the National Weather Service in Brownsville said this was the first snow fall since February 1895. Another Texas town, Victoria, saw its first white Christmas in 86 years.

THE BROWNSVILLE
TEXAS HERALD
AP

US Airways' baggage problem investigated

The Associated Press

PHILADELPHIA — Senior officials of the U.S. Department of Transportation have been talking with US Airways management about problems at Philadelphia International Airport that left thousands of travelers separated from their bags, a department spokesman said Saturday.

The problems, which US Airways attrib-

uted to the weather, also left many travelers stranded on Christmas.

"We are obviously concerned about the situation, and we will be interested in learning more from the airline about how the passengers and their luggage came to be stranded," Transportation Department spokesman Robert Johnson said Saturday. He said Transportation Secretary Norman Y. Mineta had directed the officials to talk to the airline.

US Airways said it hoped to fix the problems as quickly as possible.

The problem extended beyond Philadelphia. Huge piles of bags sat unclaimed next to the US Airways baggage counter on Friday evening at Richmond International Airport in Virginia. Dozens of travelers unable to find their luggage waited to speak with a customer service representative.

Systemwide, US Airways also canceled about 100 flights Friday.

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Bush calls for compassion in Christmas address

BY SCOTT LINDLAU
The Associated Press

WASHINGTON — President Bush issued a Christmas Day call for compassion toward the sick and suffering, urging Americans to volunteer to help the neediest among their fellow citizens.

"The Christmas season fills our hearts with gratitude for the many blessings in our lives, and with those blessings comes a re-

sponsibility to reach out to others," Bush said in his weekly radio address.

"Many of our fellow Americans still suffer from the effects of illness or poverty, others fight cruel addictions, or cope with division in their families, or grieve the loss of a loved one," he said. "Christmas time reminds each of us that we have a duty to our fellow citizens, that we are called to love

our neighbor just as we would like to be loved ourselves. By volunteering our time and talents where they are needed most, we help heal the sick, comfort those who suffer, and bring hope to those who despair, one heart and one soul at a time."

Bush also assured U.S. troops overseas that they are in the thoughts and prayers of their fellow Americans.

It was a message that has be-

come a fixture of Bush's annual Christmas broadcasts, but one with added poignancy this year, coming days after a devastating attack on a U.S. military dining hall in Mosul, Iraq. Thirteen U.S. servicemembers were among the 22 killed.

"In Afghanistan, Iraq, and elsewhere, these skilled and courageous Americans are fighting the enemies of freedom and protect-

ing our country from danger," Bush said.

"By bringing liberty to the oppressed, our troops are helping to win the war on terror, and they are defending the freedom and security of us all," the president said. "They and their families are making many sacrifices for our nation, and for that, all Americans are deeply grateful."

Bush and his family are spending a long Christmas weekend at Camp David, Md., the presidential retreat. On Sunday, he flies to their home in Crawford, Texas, where he is scheduled to remain until Jan. 2.



THE WHITE HOUSE/AP

Sitting in Camp David, Md., President Bush places Christmas Eve phone calls Friday to members of the armed forces.

President sends thanks to U.S. troops across world

The Associated Press

Stationed on the farthest island in Alaska's Aleutians, Coast Guard Fireman Michael Joseph feels like he's living at the end of the earth. But he wasn't too far away to receive a Christmas Eve greeting from President Bush.

"First thing he said was, 'Michael, Merry Christmas,'" said Joseph, 24, of Tucson, Ariz., one of 20 men at the Coast Guard's Loran Station Attu. "It was great."

Prayer calls from his mountain retreat at Camp David, Md., Bush talked to 10 members of the U.S. military around the world and in the United States to thank them for their service and share holiday greetings.

Joseph, who has been stationed on the Aleutian island for nearly nine months, awoke at 2:45 a.m. local time to prepare for the call at 4:15 a.m., which at Camp David was 8:15 a.m. EDT. The conversation lasted about four minutes. He said Bush told him, "I want to say thanks for your service out there and the sacrifice you're making."

Bush placed the calls to the servicemembers, including six stationed in Iraq — Army Staff Sgt. Eric A. Julian, Marine Cpl. Malcolm N. Hedgepeth, Navy Hospitalman Roman R. Cruz, Navy Petty Officer 1st Class Michael D. Watts, Air Force Staff Sgt. Santiago James Fontanez and Airman 1st Class Benjamin J. Miller — on Friday morning.

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Is Washington race bad for democracy?

BY REBECCA COOK
The Associated Press

OLYMPIA, Wash. — The ex-hausting, exasperating, excruciatingly close Washington governor's race might be the worst thing to happen to democracy since Florida's pregnant chads.

Or, it might be no big deal. The votes are in (or now) after being counted three times since Election Day. The results have spoken (or now). Democrat Christine Gregoire won the final recount by a mere 130 votes out of 2.9 million cast, after losing the first two counts to Republican Dino Rossi by as little as 42.

Gregoire says it is over, but even those whose most fervent holiday wish was for a decided election don't really believe that.

The Republicans are pushing hard for counties to reconsider ballots they believe were wrongly rejected. The whole mess will

probably head back to court, and it is not at all clear whether Washington will have a governor by inauguration day, Jan. 12.

So when the dust clears and the governor, whoever that may be, gets down to governing, will the controversy really make a difference? The new governor "will have difficulties in perceived legitimacy," said University of Washington political science professor David Olson. "It will be very difficult to tackle big issues with a strong policy agenda. The mandate is not there."

On the other hand, he acknowledged, losing the popular vote in 2000 did not stop George W. Bush from pursuing his agenda.

"People do have short memories," Washington State University political science professor Lance LeLoup said. "The stuff that seems so unbelievable right now, that has people clutching their hearts and moaning that this

Analysis

is the end of life as we know it, a year down the line this will be a footnote in history."

If Governor does indeed claim the governor's office, it will be the benefit of a Democratic state House and Senate.

The only sure winner so far is election reform. Proposals for reforming Washington's election system are going to be as common as umbrellas at the state Capitol this winter.

Secretary of State Sam Reed has suggested a package of changes, but he has said he believes the election went well, all things considered.

"We don't expect it to be perfect," Reed said. "But we do have a system set up to correct those

imperfections when they surface, and we have done that."

The two candidates predictably split over whether this election was free and fair.

"Like many people across Washington, I'm very concerned about the integrity of this election process, and I'm also very concerned that not all votes are being treated equally," Rossi said in an e-mailed statement Thursday. He said Washington has neither a clean election nor a legitimate governor.

Gregoire, on the other hand, brimmed with confidence in the Washington electoral system after the results were announced Thursday night.

"I think we have been a model to the rest of the nation and to the world at large," she said. "This is the biggest display of democracy I have ever seen, and I am proud of it."

Mindful of her microscopic

margin of 0.0047 percent, Gregoire reached out to Rossi voters.

"A lot of heated words have been said during this recount," she said, perhaps remembering how the state Democratic party chairman called Rossi a thief. "But with the election coming to a close I am confident we can begin move forward as one state."

Some Republicans have urged Rossi not to contest the election, if only so he can come back stronger in 2006 to challenge Democratic Sen. Maria Cantwell, or to run again for governor in 2008. Many other Republicans, though, say they will not give up so easily.

"We have the right to contest and we have the reasons to contest it," said Javier Figueroa of University Place, a state parks employee and Rossi supporter. He added: "This isn't about being a nice guy. This is about ensuring the process is a good, solid process. It's important to both sides to have that right."

W. Va. lottery winner suffers more misfortune with family

BY JENNIFER BUNDY
The Associated Press

WINFIELD, W.Va. — Seventeen-year-old Brandi Bragg was laid to rest on Friday, almost two years after the day after her grandfather came into the great wealth that some say was Brandi's misfortune.

The only granddaughter of Jack Whittaker, winner of the richest undivided lottery jackpot in U.S. history, was found dead earlier this week of what may have been a drug overdose.

Whittaker and others say her sudden access to vast wealth had brought new friends and dangerous habits.

"Since she won the lottery, she had too much money," said Becky Layton, who once took care of Brandi when she lived with her grandparents.

"I could point fingers all day

long. The money is the root of it all, I would say."

Brandi had her own apartment and several vehicles, including a Hummer and a Cadillac Escalade — indications of a teen with too much money, Layton said.

"The very first few weeks after she won the lottery, they would get \$10,000 out during the day. It was between all of them. Her mom would get out \$5,000 and Brandi would only get out five more," Layton said.

Brandi was a quiet 15-year-old with a big smile when her already-wealthy grandfather won a \$314.9 million Powerball jackpot on Christmas Day 2002. He took his winnings in a \$113 million lump sum.

Her Dec. 5 death was the latest in a series of misfortunes that have befallen Whittaker's family since then.

Among them: Whittaker's



Jewell and Jack Whittaker, rear, walk out of Richard Meadows Funeral Home in Hinton, W.Va., behind the casket of their granddaughter, Brandi Bragg, on Friday. Bragg was found dead on Monday.

home and his vehicles have been hit with a rash of break-ins. He was arrested twice this year for drunken driving, and a judge ordered him to check into a rehab center by Jan. 2.

And in September, an

18-year-old friend of Brandi's, Jesse Tribble, was found dead in Whittaker's house from an overdose of cocaine, oxycontin and methadone.

Associated Press writer Eric Schelzig in Hinton, W.Va., contributed to this report.

59-year-old pregnant

SYLVESTER, Ga. — A 59-year-old great-grandmother who could become the oldest U.S. woman known to give birth to twins is resting in the seclusion of her rural mobile home and stubbornly refuses to head for a hospital, her relatives say.

Frances Harris, who was born Nov. 30, 1945, had been expected to give birth Dec. 21.

But doctors now say the twins, a boy and a girl, are expected to be born around Dec. 28, her daughter, Kendal Byrd, said Thursday.

"She's been in pain, having some small contractions," said Byrd, who at 34 is currently Harris' youngest child.

Already Harris is the mother of five, grandmother of 14 and great-grandmother of six. Harris had her first child when she was 15 years old, which means 44 years will separate her oldest from her youngest.

The twins' father, Raymond Harris, is 60 years old.

From The Associated Press

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Justice targets federal corruption

Recent cases show increasing scrutiny of ethical misdoings

BY LOLITA C. BALDOR

The Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Former Connecticut Gov. John G. Rowland's guilty plea Thursday to a felony charge makes him only the latest in what is a steadily growing number of federal corruption prosecutions focusing on government officials.

Although totals have not yet been released, the number of such cases pursued by federal authorities has grown by as much as 15 percent over the last four years, according to a Justice Department official, who spoke on condition of anonymity.

The increase, said the official, reflects the high priority placed on public corruption cases rather than a sudden spike in the number of dishonest politicians.

But the steady slide of high-profile public officials into ethical and criminal scandals risks fostering increasing distrust of government leaders.

"The government is wounded," said Connecticut House Majority Leader James Amann. "It's something most of us are concerned about. Most people have their

hearts in the right place — to serve the public. But no matter how well you construct the laws and make the rules, there will always be the ones who decide to break the law."



Rowland

In recent months, two northeast governors have resigned in disgrace and a presidential cabinet nominee withdrew his name in a swirl of controversy over a nanny-housekeeper he employed.

Ethical missteps, ranging from improper campaign contributions and gifts to racketeering and tax fraud, also led to the downfall of former U.S. House Speaker Newt Gingrich, R-Ga., former Sen. Robert Torricelli, D-N.J., and Rep. James Traficant, D-Ohio.

And in a case that rocked the nation, former President Bill Clinton's dalliance with a White House intern led to his impeachment by the House. But he survived a Senate trial and finished his term in office.

In the most recent cases:

■ Rowland pleaded guilty to one count of conspiracy to steal honest service in connection with a two-year investigation into corruption in his administration.

■ New Jersey Gov. James E. McGreevey stepped down after acknowledging that he'd had an affair with another man.

■ Former New York Police Commissioner Bernard Kerik withdrew his name from nomination as homeland security secretary after revealing he had not paid all required taxes for a family nanny-housekeeper and that the woman may have been in the country illegally.

In 2000, federal authorities indicted 1,000 public officials, according to Justice Department statistics. By 2002, the number had increased to 1,136, while the 2003 figure, not yet released, stayed relatively stable. The 2004 total will be up again, reflecting up to a 15 percent increase over the 2000 figure, said the Justice Department official.

However, he added, "I don't

think there is more public corruption than 10 years ago or 20 years ago. I think we're doing a better job of finding it and prosecuting it."

Although the number of lawyers assigned to the Criminal Division's public integrity section has remained constant at about 30, the Justice Department works with U.S. attorneys on corruption probes, including the Rowland investigation. Justice officials from Attorney General John Ashcroft on down have said that while counterterrorism remains the top priority, ferreting out public corruption also ranks very high.

In response, a number of U.S. attorneys nationwide have set up special units to target corrupt politicians, focusing on election violations and campaign finance violations.

Lawmakers are also taking notice.

"There is a greater awareness on the part of public officials that government needs to be run in an ethical way, by ethical people," said Peggy Kerns, director of the Center for Ethics in Government at the National Conference of State Legislatures.

Whistleblower ruling

WASHINGTON — Thousands of federal doctors and medical researchers who receive some of the highest salaries in government don't enjoy the same protections to blow the whistle on wrongdoing as other civil servants, a judge has ruled.

Administrative Judge Raphael Ben-Ami of the U.S. Merit Systems Protection Board ruled recently that Dr. Jonathan Fishbein, a National Institutes of Health specialist, could not seek the board's protection from firing under the Whistleblower Protection Act.

NIH hired Fishbein in 2003 to help improve AIDS research practices. He alleges he is being fired because he uncovered concerns about research practices that might endanger patient safety.

NIH said he is being fired for poor performance.

Fishbein is an employee under Title 42 of the federal code that allows the government to pay research and medical experts higher salaries than the civil servant maximums.

Ben-Ami ruled Nov. 9 that Fishbein was not covered by the Whistleblower Protection Act because he is a Title 42 employee and has "no appeal rights" during his two-year probationary period.

From The Associated Press



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Police officer Victor Gomez inspects a vehicle involved in a carjacking at the Huster Casino in Gardena, Calif. The driver fled into the casino, where he took two people hostage before an officer shot him, authorities said.

TORRENCE DAILY BREEZE/AP

Casino hostage-taking ends in suspect's death

BY DAISY NGUYEN

The Associated Press

GARDENA, Calif. — Police shot and killed a carjacking suspect who ran into a crowded casino early Friday and took two patrons hostage.

The man hijacked a luxury car on Thursday and led police on a 30-minute chase after they spotted the vehicle early Friday, authorities said.

With the car still rolling, the man jumped out at the Huster Casino, a Gardena card club owned by Huster magazine mogul Larry Flynt.

The suspect shot at police officers in the casino's parking lot, but no one was hit, Los Angeles Police Department Assistant Chief Jim McDonnell said.

The gunman then ran into the crowded casino and took a hostage.

He later released the hostage, but took another, police said.

An LAPD officer shot the suspect in the head, McDonnell said.

The man was pronounced dead late Friday morning at a hospital, said Lt. David Smith, supervising investigator of the Los Angeles County coroner's office.

Smith said he could not release the man's name until authorities contacted his next of kin.

No one else was hurt. Patrons and casino employees poured out of the casino when they heard shots being fired.

"Up to 1,000 patrons were inside the casino when the suspect ran inside with a weapon, so you can imagine the chaotic situation," McDonnell said.

The casino was closed as police reviewed footage from a security camera and interviewed dozens of witnesses.

E-mail after death: Digital debate brews

BY ANICK JESDANUN

The Associated Press

NEW YORK — As more of our personal lives go digital, family members, estate attorneys and online service providers are increasingly grappling with what happens to those information bits when their owners die.

Sometimes, the question involves e-mail sitting on a distant server; other times, it's about the photos or financial records stored on a password-protected computer.

This week, a Michigan man publicized his struggle to access the Yahoo e-mail account belonging to his son, Marine Lance Cpl. Justin M. Ellsworth, 20, who was killed Nov. 13 in Iraq. Though Yahoo's policies state that accounts "terminate upon your death," John Ellsworth said his son would have wanted to give him access.

"He was wanting to forward his e-mail from strangers," Ellsworth said. "They were letters of encouragement. He said all their support kept him motivated. We've talked back and forth about how we were going to print them out and put them in a scrapbook."

Questions begin to arise about what happens to an individual's account after he or she dies

To release those messages in such circumstances, Yahoo said, would violate the privacy rights of the deceased and those with whom they were corresponded.

"The commitment we've made to every person who signs up for a Yahoo! Mail account is to treat their email as a private communication and to treat the content of their messages as confidential," spokeswoman Mary Osako said in a statement.

But Osako said the company was dealing with uncharted territory and was willing to continue discussions with Ellsworth. One option could involve Ellsworth getting a court order, which Yahoo would abide. Ellsworth said he preferred to avoid litigation.

Other service providers, including America Online Inc., EarthLink Inc. and Microsoft Corp., which runs Hotmail, also have policies for transferring accounts upon proof of death and identity as next of kin.

AOL spokesman Nicholas Graham said

the company gets dozens of such requests a day and has a separate fax number, mailing address and full-time service representative devoted to fulfillment.

Nonetheless, some privacy advocates question whether that's a good approach.

"People might decide what they want family members to see or keep secret sometimes for family harmony reasons," said Peter Swire, an Ohio State University law professor who served as former President Bill Clinton's chief privacy counselor. "They may know secrets of other family members that they hold in confidence. The sister had an abortion, the father had a first marriage."

Swire said Yahoo's policies are stricter than those for medical records — and rightly so. He said quick access to medical records is critical for emergency care, and such records are unlikely to trample other people's privacy rights, as e-mail could.

Rather than maintaining an either-or pol-

icy, perhaps service providers could ask users when they sign up whether they'd like e-mail disclosed upon death, said Jason Catlett, president of the privacy-rights group Junkbusters Corp.

"If you put money into an IRA (individual retirement account) or a mutual fund, they will ask you for the next of kin," Catlett said.

But Graham said cell phone providers and Internet centers don't make similar requests, and turning off with Internet service "is simply a do-or-die and it's not necessary. We already have a process that works quite well and quite responsibly."

For now, such disputes are rare, and most struggles for access involve family members who need to obtain financial records on a computer, said Bob Weiss, president of Password Crackers Inc., a Maryland company that recovers lost passwords. Less than 2 percent of Weiss's business involves relatives of the deceased, he said.

Still, "as more of our lives go online, hosted far away, we will want to think carefully about the disposition of those bits," said Jonathan Zittrain, a professor at Harvard Law School's Berkman Center for Internet & Society.



A holiday wreath adorns the locked gate of the Houston grave site of Howard Hughes on Thursday, the day before what would have been his 99th birthday.

Hughes' gravesite still popular among tourists

BY MICHAEL GRACZYK

The Associated Press

HOUSTON — Howard Hughes probably would have liked Friday, his 99th birthday.

With temperatures around the freezing mark in normally balmy Houston, the gravesite of the man whose name was invariably prefaced by "reclusive eccentric billionaire" was devoid of visitors.

That is not always the case for the final resting place of the businessman, whose name has been back in the news with the nationwide release this weekend of the Leonardo DiCaprio movie "The Aviator," about Hughes' Hollywood years.

Nearly three decades after Hughes died of kidney disease at age 72 on a plane from Acapulco, Mexico, to his native Houston, his grave at 133-year-old Glenwood Cemetery remains a popular tourist site.

The 30-by-50-foot family plot also includes the grave of his father, Howard Robney Hughes, who died in 1924 and whose oil-field drilling tool company be-

came the basis for the family fortune. His mother, who died in 1922 when her son was 16, also is buried there.

The gravesite is surrounded by an iron fence with a padlocked gate. On Friday, the gate was decorated with a pair of Christmas wreaths.

The back of the site is bordered by 6-foot-high semicircular concrete wall sculpture that includes a half-dozen brass vases.

Legend has it the granite tombstone was commissioned by Hughes to be modeled after a key his father used to carry.

The site, while distinctive, does not prominently display the Hughes name and is dwarfed by far grander memorials elsewhere in the cemetery, where some 2,000 people are buried. The billionaire was buried in 1976 in an \$8,100 casket and \$2,100 vault, according to probate court documents.

It was not until 1990 that his estate, estimated at \$1.13 billion, was settled in the courts, since he left no verified will and dozens of purported wills surfaced after his death.

It's time for the ghost ship to come

Christmastime shipwreck sparks legend in Rhode Island town

BY ELIZABETH ZUCKERMAN

The Associated Press

CRANSTON, R.I. — Rhode Island legend tells of a spectral ship that haunts the waters off Block Island, bursting into flame and sinking into the ocean. Depending on who's spinning the tale, the islanders involved in the human drama turned out to be heroes — or monsters.

The tales hold that the ship is the ghost of one that wrecked on the island's northern point shortly after Christmas 1738. Different versions say the vessel's appearance augurs bad weather and appears on the Saturday between Christmas and New Year's.

And while there's good evidence that a British ship, the Princess Augusta, carrying a load of passengers from territory that would become Germany, ran aground on the island on Dec. 27, 1738, there's accord on little else about the incident.

A deposition taken from the ship's crew shortly after the incident — and republished in 1939 — tells of a voyage in which provisions were scarce, half the crew had died, and others were hobbled by the extreme cold. In the document, crew members said a heavy snowstorm drove the ship aground.

According to folklorist Michael Bell, of Cranston, within the century after the incident, two versions became popular.

The on-island version told of the residents' generosity rescuing and nursing back to health the ill and starving passengers, who had been abused and exploited.

The other version was immortalized by the 19th-century poet and abolitionist John Greenleaf Whittier, whose poem "The Palatine" appeared in The Atlantic Monthly in 1867. In it, Block Islanders recall the wreck — and some islanders' roles in causing it by igniting false signal lights to draw the ship aground.

Then, according to the poet, they plundered the ship "like birds of prey / Tearing the heart of the ship away / And the dead never had a word to say / And then, with a ghastly shimmer and shine / Over the wreck, and the scintillant brine / They burned the wreck of the Palatine."

A year after the wreck, in another storm, the Palatine — apparently called by that name because it

carried immigrants from the Palatinate — reappeared in flames.

In the poet's account, a century after the wreck and plundering the islanders are still haunted by a blazing ghost ship which appears on some moonless nights.

It's not a flattering portrait, and it clearly ranked islanders of the poet's day as his 13th-century of the island, Samuel Livermore tried to refute Whittier's version.

"Poetic fiction has given the public a very wrong view of this occurrence, and thus a wrong impression of the Islanders has been obtained," Livermore wrote.

He included an 1876 letter from Whittier in which the poet responded to Livermore's criticisms. According to Livermore's book, Whittier said he "did not intend to misrepresent the facts of history," but wrote the poem after hearing the story from a Rhode Islander.

Livermore instead presented an account by a scholar of his day.

According to it, the ship came ashore on Sandy Point, and once the tide rose, was able to be floated again, and towed into Breach Cove by the islanders. Many fell ill, died and were buried on the island's southwest side.

Today, a marker, installed in 20th century, stands at the site. It reads simply, "Palatine Graves — 1738."

It's the only major physical evidence of the disaster. Charlotte Taylor of the Rhode Island Historical Preservation & Heritage Commission said no wreckage has ever been found.

Martha Ball, the former first warden of Block Island, said there's some evidence the ship was repaired.

Livermore blames the story of the ship's burning and other atrocities on "the testimony of a witch, an opium-eater, and a maniac" and concludes "Dutch Ketch" was the wrecked ship. Palatine was the wreck and was known as a witch) had her revenge on the ship that put her ashore by imagining it on fire, and telling others, probably, that the light on the sound was the wrecked ship Palatine.

While Livermore dismissed the story of the islanders' barbarity, he was less willing to write off accounts of the so-called Palatine Light. He noted that the light was often sighted off Sandy Point by people both on Block Island and on the mainland.

*Different
stories say the
vessel's
appearance
augurs bad
weather and
that it
appears on
the Saturday
between
Christmas
and New
Year's.*

Three-month power outage dims spirits at Fla. trailer park

BY JILL BARTON
The Associated Press

LAKE WORTH, Fla. — For Thanksgiving, Annie Johnston, her grandson and some neighbors made green-bean casserole and stuffing and ate outside by flashlight. They had the meager leftovers for the next three days.

They had hoped that by Christmas — three months after back-to-back hurricanes hit — life would be easier, that power would be restored in their rundown circle of trailers and that they could have a present or two under a tree blinking with lights.

But that hasn't happened. The days have only become harder for many poor families like Johnston's, who are still struggling to recover from a lost job, a damaged home, the mounting expenses of replacing ruined clothes, food and furniture, or worse.

"Christmas? There's no Christ-

mas right now. I'm tapped out," said Johnston, 55. "If I go to a store and they're playing Christmas music, or go through a neighborhood with lights, it tears me apart."

Across Florida, the recovery after this year's unusually harsh hurricane season, when four hurricanes smashed into the state in six weeks, with

take years. But the worst of it, when power was out, water was contaminated, food and gas were scarce, and roads were washed away, ended weeks ago for most Floridians. Insurance companies are helping those with damaged homes and businesses make repairs, and the Federal Emergency Management

Cathy Lively
Attorney for tenants of
Tropical Trailer Gardens,
Lake Worth, Fla.

Agency has brought help to others.

At the Tropical Trailer Gardens, though, many tenants feel abandoned, even though they have received some help from FEMA.



Dirty laundry is shown piled up in a bathroom at the residence of Sherry Henderson at a trailer park in Lake Worth, Fla., last week. Henderson is among some residents at Tropical Trailer Gardens that still don't have power that was lost during hurricanes that hit Florida earlier this year.

Their depressing mix of trailers sits close to Interstate 95 in an industrial park, a few miles from the elegant homes and shops of Palm Beach. Most of the park has no power, and the little electricity it has is so fragile that Johnston is afraid that if she puts out Christmas lights, they will blow out someone's refrigerator.

Johnston and her neighbors now fear they will soon be homeless. Their landlord says fixing the electrical problems would be so expensive that he wants to bulldoze the place instead.

Sherry Henderson, 56, received \$300 from FEMA, but like most of her neighbors, she spent it weeks ago on food and a few nights in a motel so she could

have a hot shower. She has appealed to the agency for more aid to cover some rent and relocation expenses. Her Social Security disability income is not enough to help her move on.

Fifteen tenants, many of who are disabled and on a fixed income, are suing the landlord, Wesley Cox, who they say carelessly patched up a faulty electrical system for the past decade. Most are withholding at least part of their \$250 monthly rent for their lots until improvements are made. On Thursday, Cox issued written demands for the back rent — the first step toward eviction.

"I think there have been more habitable places in Third World countries than at this park," said

the tenants' attorney, Cathy Lively. "The situation at this point is very, very primitive."

Cox said he could fix the problems himself, but the city is requiring him to hire a licensed electrical contractor and fining him \$200 a day until he does. Cox and his attorney, Bill Layton, said replacing the electrical system could cost more than \$100,000 and require a bank loan. Cox called it "an impossibility" because the damaged property would not qualify.

But FEMA officials say the trailer park could be eligible for a low-interest loan from the Small Business Administration, and tenants can apply again if they need more help.

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PC virus attacks in overdrive on holidays

BY RACHEL KONRAD
The Associated Press

SAN JOSE, Calif. — Susan Love's problems began with a smile.

The New York City fund-raiser clicked on a happy-face attachment in a friend's e-mail last year. The virus crashed her computer within an hour.

Love, 57, salvaged her data. But within a few months her computer's performance slowed to a crawl. In December 2003, she upgraded to a Sony Vaio with an extra-large monitor and Microsoft's Windows XP operating system.

Within a few days, "spyware" — programs that sneak onto computers unnoticed — began siphoning up valuable memory. Then her e-mail stopped arriving.

Instead of crafting holiday e-mails, she spent hours installing the latest anti-virus, anti-advertising and anti-spyware software.

"You have to become something of a nerd to make sure your computer is safe," said Love, a former English teacher who recently installed anti-ware on her daughter's computer. "If you

don't sweep the computer every night, you could hit."

Hackers, spammers and spies go into overdrive in December and January, when unsuspecting neophytes unwrap new computers, connect to the Internet, and, too often, get hit with viruses, spyware and other nefarious programs.

"People want to get on the Net right away, just like they want to put together and start using any Christmas present," said Tony Redmond, chief technology officer of Palo Alto, Calif.-based computer giant Hewlett-Packard Co., whose new PCs ship with 60 days of virus and adware protection. "They should be warned that the Net is a very, very dangerous place."

The most vulnerable computers are the ones that have sat under Christmas trees for days or weeks. If a consumer buys equipment that arrives on Dec. 15, and it sits in the living room until Dec. 25, it could be hit by hundreds of viruses written in the 10-day interim.

Experts say consumers should vigilantly buy and update security software, which can add hundreds of dollars over the course of a computer's lifetime.

Shopping frenzy comes late

Last-minute rush gives stores hope amid lackluster sales

The Associated Press

With just hours to go before Christmas, the nation's retailers hoped a last-minute flurry of holiday shoppers, whether delayed by winter storms or by simple procrastination, would be enough to shore up an otherwise disappointing season.

Retailers were heartened by an uptick in sales at malls last week, and customer traffic appeared solid Friday. But the industry is still resigned to the fact that the 2004 holiday shopping season won't be stellar — the question is whether the last-minute boost will be enough to help stores meet their modest sales goals.

The exceptions have been online shopping, with sales at the high end of projections, and luxury stores, which have continued with robust sales from their well-heeled customers.

That means merchants are once again finding themselves in the same position as they were last year, relying on those last-minute shoppers, who seem to be delaying their buying even later than a year ago. But with many stores struggling with high inventories this year, plenty of customers looking for bargains were pleased with the options.

"It looks like the deals are getting better," said Chad Mowbray, of New Hope, Ga., who bought himself an Izod polo shirt at Rich's-Macy's de-

partment store for half price at the Lenox Square in Atlanta.

For those who waited until the end, however, procrastinating does carry risks.

"I saw the perfect necklace for my niece, but someone snatched it from me," said Patrick Radeboldt, who was shopping in Manhattan.

In Cincinnati, Ohio, and other parts of the Midwest hit by a heavy snowstorm Thursday, plenty of shoppers were out doing the last-minute buying they were supposed to do earlier in the week.

"If it had been like the last two days, I wouldn't have come out," said Pat Marler, who was at the Eastgate Mall in suburban Cincinnati. "I mainly needed to pick up a few odds and ends. I actually did my shopping a little earlier than usual — luckily. I just have one more stop, then I'm heading home because it's just too cold."

Ellen Tolley, a spokeswoman at the National Retail Federation, said the industry group continues to forecast a 4.5 percent gain in total holiday sales, which exclude restaurant and auto sales. She noted that the Midwestern storms did put a damper on sales in certain areas, calling it a "momentary glitch," but said a lot of shoppers had planned their shopping around it.

Meanwhile, online sales have

Shoppers were stirring

A late rush: An increase in sales at malls around the country last week has given retailers hope of meeting sales goals for the holiday season.

Discount blues: The season has been disappointing for many discount and moderate-priced retailers, while luxury stores and online retailers reported more robust sales. Overall, the National Retail Federation forecasts a 4.5 percent gain over 2003.

Procrastination nation: Merchants say shoppers seem to be delaying their purchases even more than they did a year ago. Some might have been hindered by recent Midwest storms.

been robust. Internet research firm comScore Networks Inc. said online sales in November and December are tracking at the high end of its forecast of a 23 percent to 26 percent gain from the year-earlier period.

While Christmas Eve day is not traditionally a big sales generator, Tolley believes it could be much busier than in years past because this year it's a federal holiday, providing shoppers the opportunity to do more buying on that day.



Christmas Eve shoppers wait in line to purchase gift certificates Friday at Westfarms Mall in West Hartford, Conn. Last-minute shoppers packed malls and shopping areas across the country looking to complete their holiday lists.

Hurricanes driving up the cost of gift-boxed fruit for the holidays

By LYNN BREZOSKY

The Associated Press

HARLINGEN, TEXAS — This is not exactly a season of joy for shoppers of gift-boxed grapefruit and oranges.

The three hurricanes that battered Florida's citrus groves over the summer devastated the state's grapefruit and orange crop, causing a sharp rise in wholesale prices for the fruit that is stamped, wrapped and nestled in boxes for the chilly north every Christmas season.

Some gift-box shippers in Florida and Texas, the No. 1 and No. 2 grapefruit states, are now stuck with charging the lower prices they printed in their brochures and catalogs long before the storms hit. Others have raised prices, packing on a 52 to 84 "hurricane surcharge" when customers place their orders.

"We're paying about 50 percent more for fruit than we had planned. With the price of gasoline, the cost of getting the fruit out and delivered — it hurts the profits," said Frank Davis, owner of Pittman & Davis, a fruit shipping business in Harlingen that decided not to risk alienating customers by imposing a surcharge.

Florida this season is expecting its smallest grapefruit crop since the Depression, and its worst orange crop in 13 years.

Texas growers are hoping Florida's loss is their gain, with grape-



Workers at Pittman & Davis, gift fruit shippers, sort and package oranges and grapefruit into boxes Dec. 15 in Harlingen, Texas. Shippers are watching profits dwindle as the cost of produce has risen due to hurricane damage while they are stuck with the prices they printed in brochures and catalogs long before the hurricanes hit.

fruit lovers deciding they prefer Texas' redder fruit to Florida's more white and pink varieties. Texas growers are still rebounding from freezes in 1983 and 1989 that killed trees and drove many farmers out of business.

"This year has the potential to be the most profitable year that citrus growers have had in 25 years," said Frank Prewett, executive director of Texas Citrus Mutual, an organization of growers.

Shippers of gift boxes do most of their business around Christ-

mas. At the Pittman & Davis shed, it is peak season, with about 150 workers working 18-hour days to fill pack fruit into boxes for shipment all around the country. This season they expect to sell some 800,000 boxes of fruit — 80 percent of it before Christmas.

Davis said he did not believe a hurricane surcharge would fly for fruit from Texas.

"It'd be nice if we could get away with that," he said. "But I don't think it would make our customers happy."

High-tech lump of coal: Dad sells bad kids' gifts on eBay

The Associated Press

HOUSTON — The kids were naughty. Dad put the presents on eBay instead of under the tree — and Mom's been crying ever since.

Now, even the tree's down.

Saturday morning was not very jolly for three brothers — 9, 11 and 15 — who didn't straighten up when their father told them Santa wasn't too pleased with their fighting, cuss words and obscene gestures.

Dad and Mom had warned their sons that the Nintendo DS video system — and the three games that go with it — were headed for the auction block if they didn't get their act together.

"No kidding. Three underserving boys have crossed the line. Tonight we sat down and showed them what they WILL NOT get for Christmas this year. I'll be taking the tree down tomorrow," the man announced in his eBay posting.

"If you don't buy them, we'll return them to the store," the seller known online as magnumo—2000 reported on the site.

On Thursday night, the auction went down, with bidding at \$465.01 — below the price the man had set. He said he would probably list the items again.

A single day of particularly bad behavior set the Christmas card down in motion.

"These are normally really good kids," said Dad, who asked the Houston Chronicle not to reveal his name.

Dad even admits he and Mom are partly to blame for being too lax at times.

But enough was enough. The warning of an impending sale came earlier in the week at a sit-down between offspring and parents.

"We told them they were destroying each other and the calm and peace in the household. It had to stop," said the man, who did tell the paper that he works as an information technology specialist and lives in Pasadena.

The boys pledged to be nice but were back to their old ways the next morning.

That night, Dad announced that he would indeed be putting \$700 in video games up for sale on eBay. The oldest boy double-dared his dad to make good on his word.

Son shouldn't have done that.

Dad said Mom has been in tears since the showdown. "I don't do it outwardly," he said, "but I'm crying on the inside."

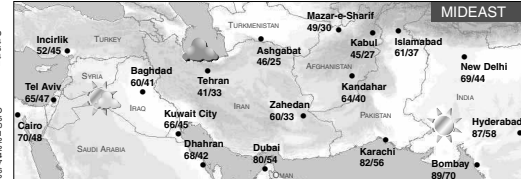


AFRICA

Cape Town	79	63	Mogadishu	81	LO
Bahran	69	69	Nairobi	81	66
Freeport	88	74	Rabat	60	44
Kinshasa	87	72	Tripoli	63	41

THE WORLD

Amsterdam	44	LO	Manila	88	75
Bahran	69	69	Mexico City	89	74
Beijing	32	13	Montreal	11	01
Bombay	86	69	Plymouth	61	46
Buenos Aires	73	68	Rio de Jan	87	72
Calcutta	78	66	Sofia	46	37
Chengdu	74	59	Sydney	75	66
Hong Kong	55	49	Tokyo	56	42

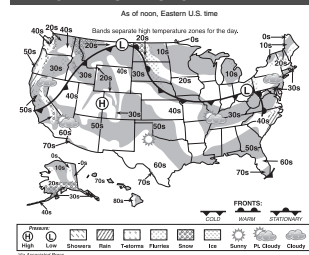


TODAY'S STATESIDE OUTLOOK

City	HI	LO	City	HI	LO
Albany, N.Y.	60	38	Cleveland	35	29
Albany, N.Y.	60	38	Columbus, Ga.	43	38
Albuquerque	42	24	Columbus, Ohio	52	31
Albuquerque	42	24	Columbus, Ohio	52	31
Albuquerque	42	24	Columbus, Ohio	52	31
Albuquerque	42	24	Columbus, Ohio	52	31
Albuquerque	42	24	Columbus, Ohio	52	31
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Albuquerque	42	24	Columbus, Ohio	52	31
Albuquerque	42	24	Columbus, Ohio	52	31
Albuquerque	42	24	Columbus, Ohio	52	31

THE UNITED STATES TODAY



EUROPEAN FORECAST

Benelex: Mostly cloudy to cloudy with rain and snow showers. Highs in the upper 30s to lower 40s.

Britain, Ireland: Partly cloudy to mostly cloudy with isolated rain showers. Highs in the upper 30s to mid 40s.

Croatia and Bosnia: Mostly cloudy to cloudy with rain and fog. Highs in the upper 30s to mid 40s.

France: Mostly cloudy to cloudy with isolated rain showers and light snow showers to the north. Highs in the upper 30s to upper 40s.

Northern Germany: Mostly cloudy to cloudy with isolated rain showers in the afternoon. Highs in the mid to upper 30s.

Southern Germany: Cloudy with rain showers and isolated snow showers. Highs in the mid 30s.

Hungary: Mostly cloudy with rain showers. Highs in the mid 40s.

Northern Italy: Mostly cloudy to cloudy with rain showers. Highs in the mid 30s to low 40s.

Southern Italy: Mostly cloudy to cloudy with rain and isolated thunderstorms. Highs in the lower 60s.

Kosovo: Mostly cloudy to cloudy with rain showers. Highs in the mid 30s.

Norway: Partly cloudy to mostly cloudy with isolated light rain/snow showers in the morning. Highs in the mid 20s to upper 30s.

Portugal, Spain: Partly cloudy to mostly cloudy with rain showers and light snow showers to the north. Highs in the lower 40s to lower 50s in the north and higher in the south. Highs to lower 60s in the south.

Turkey: Partly cloudy. Highs in the upper 30s to the north and in low to mid 50s to the south.

For current weather watches, warnings, and day forecasts go to the USAF Operational Weather Squadron home page at:
<http://ows.sembach.af.mil>
<http://ows.public.sembach.af.mil>

SUN & MOON

City	Sunrise (Baghdad)	Sunset (Frankfurt)	Sunrise (Frankfurt)	Sunset (Frankfurt)
Today	6:24AM	5:03PM	6:24AM	5:03PM
Tomorrow	7:05AM	5:23PM	7:05AM	5:23PM

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Tolerate the holidays

I learned of a few soldiers in the division who claimed offense to the spirited holiday decorations adorning the offices where they work.

Evidently they claim that decorations reflect a religion or religious celebration and that they would prefer to not have them.

Did these people come from America? And do they choose the American culture? It is incomprehensible to think that soldiers who are ordered to respect the Muslim culture with its religious and cultural differences cannot see that they come from a culture.

The culture of America celebrates Christmas. People celebrate it in many different ways. I prefer modest decorations, mostly to please the children. Others have candles in the windows; some like monstrous, gaudy light displays.

If a person chooses not to be a part of the culture, he or she does not have to try to make everyone else revolve around his or her rejection. In America, we respect all cultures and relish the differences, not despise them.

Who is upset when people celebrate Fourth of July? It was predominantly Christians who founded this country, who passed on their ideals and put their life on the line by signing the Declaration of Independence. (Those opposed to Christmas decorations) should be upset that we celebrate independence, too, but that never crossed their minds, did it?

It was those same men who also said that every man is created equal with certain inalienable rights. One of those rights is the pursuit of happiness.

Well, be happy, brother soldiers. Culture is not bad. Culture is everywhere; you live in it. Get your teeth for a few days and the holiday season will be over.

Chief Warrant Officer G. Glen W. Nardin
 Camp Liberty, Iraq

'Tis the main holiday season

In reference to "What holiday is it?" (letter, Dec. 22): It is the holiday season; we have Thanksgiving, Kwanzaa, Hanukkah, Christmas and New Year's all within a short period.

Tell us what you think

Stars and Stripes welcomes your comments on editorials and columns that are published in the magazine, and values letters on topics of importance in the lives of our readers. All letters must be signed, and must include the writer's address or base and telephone number. Please limit all letters to 300 words. We reserve the right to edit letters for length, taste and clarity.

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So, to the letter writer: Don't get too stressed, enjoy all the holidays and, if it makes you happy, just say "Merry Christmas."

Happy Holidays.

Gordon Uscier
 Würzburg, Germany

Don't give in to winners

"What holiday" is it? (letter, Dec. 22) hits the nail on the head. The more we give in to the winners, who without a doubt will move on to the next game after they win this one, the more they find to win about.

I used to think that organizations like the American Civil Liberties Union were intended for the pursuit of our civil rights but, in recent years, it seems that the ACLU and similar groups will foster any cause that makes headlines.

Take, for instance, the man who wanted the Pledge of Allegiance discontinued in his daughter's school. It makes no difference that he didn't even have custody of her; the problem was that this issue was allowed to be pursued in the first place. The fact that it was only dismissed because he was not the custodial parent was just a way for the courts to get out of an issue that should've never been there in the first place.

The older I get, the more worried I be-

come that my children will be growing up in an America that is constantly being degraded by the whiny few, who manage to get national attention drawn to them when they stand up against the very ideals upon which this nation was founded. I agree that we should allow everyone their right to speak out freely, but those who put down and bad-mouth the very standards by which this country was borne should not be placed on a national media pedestal.

Anyway, Merry Christmas to you, and to everyone else out there (even the winners). God Bless America, too!

Michael "A.J." Lawrence
 Spangdahlem Air Base, Germany

Women's conference ad wrong

This in reference to the "religious activity" ad in the Dec. 20 issue (European edition).

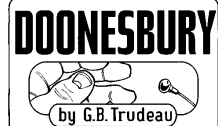
As a religious person myself, I can only endorse the Real Women's Conference 2005 Stripes advertised, and I will certainly do my best to spread the word to help increase the turnout. The special guests and lunch deal make it a very promising event.

What concerns me though is the graphic art depicting a Christian pastor in battle dress uniform holding the Gospel in one hand and a pistol in the other, complete with rappelling soldiers in the background. The words "Behind enemy lines; no guts, no glory" are a little baffling as well. How will these messages be perceived by non-Christians?

Although the ad clearly meant well by raising interest, let's please keep it more real and more to power-peaceful images. If we don't exercise our own good taste and judgment, someone else will. The American Civil Liberties Union is currently ramping up its anti-religious crusade, looking for more opportunities to capitalize on.

Apparently, they have an elite army of anti-religious lawyers at their complete disposal and haven't even spared the Boy Scouts. As times are becoming tough for religious folks, let's not give the ACLU ammunition to take religion out of our military communities.

Raphael Ereditia
 Mannheim, Germany



by G.B. Trudeau

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OPINION

What newspapers are saying at home

The following editorial excerpts are selected from a cross section of newspapers throughout the United States. The editorials are provided by The Associated Press and other statewide syndicates.

Iraq vote amid the bloodshed Los Angeles Times

The attack Tuesday on a U.S. military base in northern Iraq that killed more than 20 people... provided graphic evidence that the insurgency is little diminished.

Many of the guerrillas driven from Fallujah last month when U.S. officials proclaimed a major victory moved to Mosul and other cities and continue to wreak havoc. President Bush's belated admission Monday that suicide bombers are "having an effect" understated the problem....

Some Sunni leaders already are urging a boycott of the elections, which will choose a transitional national assembly to write a constitution and pick a prime minister. This is a mistake on their part. A boycott would undercut, though not destroy, the legitimacy of the balloting. But it would ensure that Sunnis have even less of a voice in the future of their nation.

For Washington, the main concern is protecting thousands of polling places in order for the election results to be deemed credible. Bush said Monday the training of Iraqi security forces had produced "mixed" results. That was another understatement... many troops have been fired when attacked. We can only hope that an Iraqi government with the legitimacy many would demand more loyalty and a greater willingness among police and soldiers to stand and fight.

Trouble is, for that to happen the election they could provide that greater legitimacy needs to be held, and protected.

Reaction to verdict disturbing Chicago Tribune

Outside the California courtroom where jurors sentenced convicted murderer Scott Peterson to Dec. 23, hundreds of onlookers let out a cheer and high-fived each other when they learned of the recommendation that he be put to death.

The disturbing scene conjured images of public square hangings in colonial America, where a giddy, almost celebratory mood hung in the air the way it might at a summer Little League championship.

Forget whether one believes Peterson to be innocent or guilty, deserving of death or life in prison. This kind of reaction was an embarrassment. In the case of the Peterson trial, [the crowd's] size and exuberance were fueled in part by the disproportionate, lurid interest cable television and tabloid news took in this particular trial.

Death sentences may well be an expression of a community's moral outrage toward the crime committed, but high-living? Death is sport? There was nothing to celebrate here.

Insurers add to Fla. damage Florida Today, Melbourne

The Florida State Cabinet was right to extend an order stopping insurers from canceling policies over inability to get hard-to-arrange repairs for hurricane-damaged homes....

But why stop with half-measures, when it's obvious the state should prohibit any insurer operating in Florida from canceling any homeowner policy just because of hurricane damage — not just for a few weeks, but ever.

In case the insurance businesses don't quite understand the deal they make with customers, let us explain: Property owners pay premiums each year for coverage in case of disaster. Insurers are supposed to pay claims promptly.

For them to cancel policies in what amounts to a punishment for making claims is ludicrous.

But it's so common that the moratorium



was needed to protect the home-mortgage market, which faces a classic Catch 22. Damaged homes are uninsurable, but all mortgaged homes must be insured.

That just got a temporary fix. Now, the state must prohibit all insurers from dumping customers simply for seeking the coverage they paid for.

Hamm helped all find the net Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

Mia Hamm didn't invent women's soccer, nor did she blaze the trail allowing women on the field. But she turned what had been a dirt road into an interstate highway, presiding over an era of astronomical growth and popularity for women's soccer.

For nearly two decades, she has been the best women's soccer player in the world.... Ms. Hamm retired with 158 goals in international competitions, the most of any soccer player in history, male or female.... For a whole generation of young soccer players, Ms. Hamm served as an inspiration....

Mia Hamm's influence stretches beyond soccer. Born only months after the passage of Title IX, she symbolizes a second wave in the rise of women's athletics, sports once relegated only to high school and college fields are now ticketed spectator events with mainstream fans and corporate endorsements....

As Ms. Hamm repeats an anecdote in interviews, the success of U.S. women's soccer isn't just about her. Four of Ms. Hamm's teammates on the gold-medal winning Athens Olympics team also played for the national team starting in the 1980s — and most are also on the verge of retirement. To Julie Foudy, Kristine Lilly, Brandi Chastain, Joy Fawcett and Mia Hamm, we say thanks, and enjoy the view from the sidelines.

Time to 'reset the force' Yakima (Wash.) Herald-Republic

While griping in the ranks is a military tradition, a member of the Tennessee National Guard took it to a new level when Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld, who had dropped by a base in Kuwait for a brief pep talk, got peppered himself instead.

"Why do we soldiers have to dig through local landfills for pieces of scrap metal and compromised ballistic glass to up-arm our vehicles?" Scott Thomas Wilson, a member of the Tennessee National Guard, asked of the Pentagon chief. "We do not have proper armored vehicles to carry with us north."... Chalk one up for the grunts. The guards-

man has a good point, and Rumsfeld's lame response only further illustrates just how ill-prepared the Pentagon and military brass were for an extended deployment in Iraq.

More than 21 months after President Bush declared "mission accomplished," there is a crying need for what is called, in military jargon, "resetting the force."... [C]urrent efforts at resupply and upgrade are too slow and not enough. And it shouldn't take the quizzing of the defense chief by an enlisted man to point that out.

Army's account doesn't add up The Lima (Ohio) News

The Army [this month] provided a couple more examples of why it is becoming increasingly difficult to believe what one hears — at least what one hears first — from the military.

The drowning death of an Elida (Ohio) native in Iraq appears to be the most recent Army information blunder. The circumstances of Staff Sgt. Aaron Todd Reese's death last December will have to wait until an investigation is complete, but there's little reason for optimism about the Army, given the track record.

Reese fell from a patrol boat into the Tigris River south of Baghdad in December 2003. Another soldier, Sgt. Todd Bates, a 20-year-old Belaire native, jumped into the water to rescue Reese, but both men drowned....

U.S. Rep. Bob Ney early this month asked the Army to investigate the deaths. The Bates family contacted the St. Clairsville Republican after a soldier said Bates and Reese were forced to use a boat to patrol that lacked safety equipment....

Perhaps if we could trust the Army to release accurate information, people like the Reese and the Bates families wouldn't have to go through this.... The Army is making the families of fallen soldiers suffer a second time.

Movement fails honesty test The Anniston (Ala.) Star

Most "reforms" — whether liberal or conservative — come as part of a political agenda. Consider charter schools. A couple of decades ago conservative ideologues, upset with the power of teachers' unions and education lobbyists, began blaming what they felt was the sad state of schools on the bureaucrats that ran things.... To deal with the problems that they invent-

ed, reformers on the right... latched on to the idea of charter schools. Under the charter system, certain schools would continue to get tax money but would be freed from all the rules and regulations that conservatives claimed were holding them back....

Now, after a decent period of experimentation, the results are coming in. And guess what? According to a report just released by the U.S. Department of Education, on tests administered in 2003 to fourth-graders in public schools (including charter schools), charter school students did not do any better than regular school students and in math they did significantly worse.... Charter schools are not proving what was promised. So why does the Bush administration and the GOP continue to push charter schools as a better way to educate our young people? Could it be that the real purpose is not to improve education but to reduce the political influence of groups like the American Federation of Teachers? Do you think that the supporters of charter schools would sacrifice student learning and taxpayer money to accomplish that? Sure looks that way from here.

Make the right call on flights Rochester (N.Y.) Democrat and Chronicle

Many stressed-out travelers look forward to the moment when an airline attendant asks them to please turn off their cell phones and wireless Internet devices....

Flights provide one of the few stretches in modern times when a person can't answer a phone, can't reply to an e-mail and can't check stock prices. Flying far above all the work that's waiting, airline passengers find peace, quiet and calm.

Well, no more, says the Federal Communications Commission. It voted, on Dec. 15, to allow high-speed Internet connections on airplanes. Cell phones may be next.

Since the announcement, the FCC has been flooded with e-mails from people begging it to maintain the ban on cell phones during flights. We agree that spending hours trapped in a tight cabin surrounded by people discussing their shopping lists is nothing to look forward to.

Of course, there's always hope that enterprising airlines will offer up coverage in exchange by offering communication-free sections....

In the meantime, people should savor quiet flights, knowing that they may one day look back fondly on a time when it was possible to be incommunicado.

Dog back at home

NH NASHUA — A 71-year-old man who was separated from his dog during a traffic accident has been reunited with the tiny rat terrier.

Dicks escaped from Baker's car after the accident in Amherst. The 4½-year-old terrier raced off while Baker was being treated.

Distraught family members had returned to the area daily to look for him.

Then the family received a phone message from Rod and Lynn Spencer of Merrimack, about 5 miles from the accident scene. They saw the dog in their driveway and recognized it from a picture in the newspaper.

Thwarting horse theft

TX FORT WORTH — It's not a horse to get a lot harder to steal a horse in Texas.

Starting in January, the Fort Worth-based Texas and Southwest Cattle Raisers Association will launch a national Web-based theft-prevention service.

The service will help ranchers and law enforcement officers track down stolen horses by recording vital information from horses, such as color, description, medical history and brand and will include a digital picture, said Todd McCartney, director of the program for the organization.

For \$30 per horse, information submitted by horse owners will be made available to law enforcement through the Internet. After two years, the annual rate drops to \$10 per horse, McCartney said. The association's 13,000 members, however, can immediately subscribe to the service for \$10 per horse, he said.

The association's field inspectors recovered more than \$5 million in stolen livestock and equipment in 2003.

Judge orders fish review

MT BILLINGS — A federal judge in Colorado has ordered the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to re-evaluate the status of Yellowstone cutthroat trout and whether the fish should be protected under the Endangered Species Act.

The agency "arbitrarily and capriciously" concluded that a petition seeking federal protection for the fish did not present "substantial information" that such protection was warranted, federal Judge Phillip S. Figa wrote in a decision issued late last week.

Figa ordered the Fish and Wildlife Service to complete a 12-month review of the matter.

Milkshake poisoning

MI TROY — A woman who police say tried to kill her husband and teenage son by offering them milkshakes laced with lethal doses of prescription medication has been charged in the case.

A warrant for Mary Ellen Cannon was signed, Oakland County Chief Deputy Prosecutor Deborah Carley said. Cannon was expected to face five felony counts, including attempted murder and poisoning.

Police said the motive was unclear.

If convicted, the 46-year-old suburban Detroit woman could be sen-

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

tenced to up to life in prison.

Toxicology reports indicated that lethal doses of prescription medications prescribed for sleep disorders and panic attacks, regulating blood pressure and easing pain were found in the milkshakes.

Splitting county vote

CA SANTA BARBARA — If voters approve a county split and form a new Mission County in the north, residents in remaining Santa Barbara County will be saddled with the existing \$43 million in capital debt. A five-member panel deciding the financial viability of a new county spent months wrestling with a "fair, just and equitable" division of assets and debt. Voters are expected to decide on a split in June 2006.

Undelivered mail

VA ROANOKE — A postal worker was fired and could face charges after federal authorities, acting on a tip, found thousands of pieces of undelivered mail in the letter-carrier's home and garage.

U.S. Postal Inspector Brett Brumbaugh said a citizen who discovered more than 500 pieces of undelivered mail contacted law enforcement officials. He would not elaborate on where the mail was found.



Awesome skate trick
Drew Williams shows off his best flip trick at a skate park in El Dorado, Ark.

The investigation led authorities to search a temporary postal worker's home, Brumbaugh said. He said the mail found at the home included everything from credit card applications to packages to bills. Some of the mail had been opened, he said.

Brumbaugh said the case will be turned over to the federal prosecutor, who could charge the former carrier with stealing mail.

Naughty act

PA SHAMOKIN — Santa definitely knows one boy was not nice this year.

A 17-year-old is accused of firing a pellet gun from a second-story window, hitting a man dressed as Santa Claus. Police said the boy confessed.

Scott Slodysko, a volunteer fireman, was riding out a fire truck when he heard a popping sound at an intersection.

Slodysko said he knew immediately that somebody with a pellet gun was to blame.

"We do this for the kids," Slodysko said. "I just can't believe someone would do something like that."

Unlocking mysteries

IL CHICAGO — A new X-ray machine will help anthropologists unlock mysteries locked inside some of the Field Museum's collection of ancient mummies and pottery. Mikron Digital Imaging is lending the \$225,000 portable X-ray, used to diagnose broken bones. Among 40 specimens selected from the museum's 1.5 million anthropology objects, researchers will examine the skeleton of "The Magdalenian Girl" to gauge her exact age.

Limiting decorations

UT SALT LAKE CITY — Some Utah cities, including Salt Lake City, are trimming their Christmas decorations. Some cash-strapped towns say they're cutting back on lights and other decorations and turning those responsibilities to the private sector. In Salt Lake, private groups including the Mormon church have combined to spend an estimated \$1 million to light up Utah's capital city.

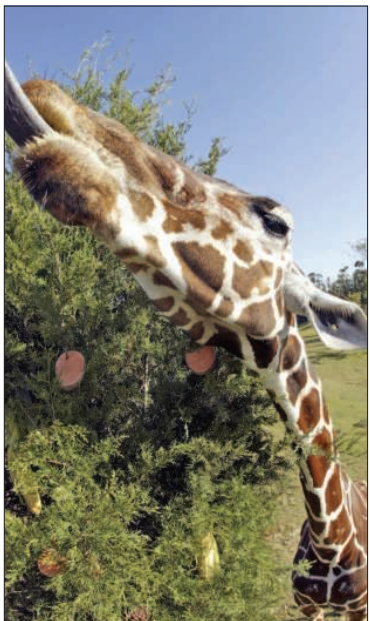
Tunnel to open

PA PITTSBURGH — A 3,600-foot tunnel route in and out of Pittsburgh will open Monday for the first time in 74 years.

Officials hope the former railroad tunnel will ease traffic for a city hedged in by rivers. The tunnel was closed when the old Wash Railroad went bankrupt. The passage will be restricted to car pools during rush hour. It's expected that as many as 4,500 vehicles will use the tunnel daily.

Antiques net profit

KY FRANKFORT — A collection of abandoned treasures owned by the state sold on eBay for \$16,180 after a weeklong auction. The items included jewelry, silverware, pocket watches and antique currency. The state treasury department put items from 20 forgotten safe-deposit boxes on the Web site Dec. 13. The highest bid was \$3,151.01 for a gold pocket watch purchased by a bidder in Israel.



Tree-licking good

A giraffe reaches for a nutritious, edible Christmas ornament adorning a tree in Bush Gardens Serengeti Plain, in Tampa, Fla. The festive treats are part of the park's animal enrichment program offered regularly to many species at Bush Gardens Tampa.



Here I come!

Chas Duckett, 8, enjoys sledding down the hill at 13th Street in Ames, Iowa, after the area's first substantial snow fall.



Big proposal Roofing contractor Kevin Sterwald makes his intentions known in a big way by displaying a marriage proposal for his girlfriend, Jodi Buchholz, on the roof of a barn he was working in on rural Watertown, Wis. The 90-foot sign and a waiting limousine surprised Buchholz, who arrived anticipating only lunch. She accepted his proposal.



Good to the last drop A squirrel cleans the last drops from a beverage cup found blowing in the wind in Hoyt Park in Saginaw, Mich.



Tropical sunset A worker places artificial palm branches into a cell phone tower on Haven Avenue in Rancho Cucamonga, Calif., as the sun sets.



Tree wrapping Brian Foster, left, pushes as Wally Reney pulls a Christmas tree through a tree wrapper for a customer at Monadnock View Farm in Keene, N.H.

Crime boss on the run

MA BOSTON — Fugitive mobster James "Whitey" Bulger is getting better with age, even as federal authorities say they're refining their nearly 10-year hunt for the former Boston crime boss.

Bulger, 75, has made fewer mistakes in recent years. Early on, he made regular contact with associates, but a new detailed timeline of his odyssey shows he's since isolated himself.

Authorities say they're as determined as ever to capture Bulger, who lived a double life as a ruthless gangster and an FBI informant before fleeing racketeering charges in January 1995. He's also charged in connection with 21 murders.

Investigators over the past decade have looked into Bulger sightings in about 30 nations and every continent but Antarctica.

Most of the sightings, however, turned out to be false alarms.

Ruffling experience

WV BECKLEY — Jared Williams ruffled a few feathers while driving on Interstate 64.

A wild truck flew into the truck's windshield.

Williams was traveling about 70 mph at the time, but managed to pull safely to the side of the road.

"It looked like someone stuffed the turkey in the windshield," said Dave Creager of Creager Automotive Repair Service. "It didn't look real."

Williams, 22, had been driving a company truck for Appalachian Laboratories during the collision, and endured turkey jokes from his co-workers the rest of the day.

Archbishop's say denied

CO DENVER — The Catholic Lawyers Guild of Colorado decided against giving the Denver archbishop the final say when it comes to choosing honorees for their two annual awards. Incoming guild president Laura Tighe says the organization wanted Independence from Archbishop Charles Chaput, who has criticized politicians and others for not following church teachings on abortion and other issues.

More money for tutors

AZ PHOENIX — The state plans to use an anticipated \$10 million in surplus school aid to add tutoring for students having difficulty passing the AIMS graduation test. So far, only half of the state's high school juniors have passed the math portion. The governor and state superintendent agreed to use the surplus money rather than wait for a legislative appropriation.

American adventure

MN MANKATO — Donors bought a bus ticket and gave traveling money to a man who suffered a series of misadventures after illegally crossing the Mexican border, but he probably just needed a good map.

Juan Rivera, 46, left his home in Juarez, Mexico, last week. He slipped into El Paso, Texas, and went to Riverside, Calif., to look for a temporary job. When he couldn't find work, he asked someone which train headed back to El Paso.

But the train went to the wrong city. So he got on another train, then another. Somehow he ended up in Mankato in the middle of the night, according to Blue Earth County Sheriff Brad Peterson, who heard Rivera's story through an interpreter.

Wearing only jeans and three shirts, Rivera walked to a convenience store and crawled into a trash bin to stay warm. But a garbage truck dumped the contents of the trash bin, including Rivera, into the truck.

When the truck got to its next stop, Rivera crawled out the back and the driver called 911. He was treated at a local hospital for minor injuries.

Although he entered the country illegally, Peterson said the Bureau of Immigration and Customs Enforcement had no interest in him. Having broken no local laws, and considering his harrowing experience, Peterson told Rivera he was free to go.

Expensive tree strapping

VT MONTPELIER — Strapping that Christmas tree to the top of a sport utility vehicle can be a real drag.

A couple of engineers at the University of Vermont claim that sport utility vehicles topped with trees have 26 percent more aerodynamic drag than treeless SUVs.

Knowing the energy density of gasoline, typical engine efficiencies and the number of trees sold, they concluded that an extra 53,000 gallons of gas are used each year to retrieve trees.

And given high fuel costs, that translates to a nationwide total of about \$100,000.

Police psychotherapist

IN INDIANAPOLIS — Gov.-elect Mitch Daniels named a police psychotherapist and martial arts lord of fame to head the Indiana State Police. Dr. Paul Whitesell, 53, is a psychotherapist with the Fort Wayne Police Department and has been a trainer with law enforcement agencies and the U.S. military. He was inducted into the Martial Arts Hall of Fame in 2002.

Hair Cuttery lawsuit

MD BALTIMORE — Eight women have filed a federal class action against Hair Cuttery's parent company, saying the Virginia-based salon chain discriminates against black customers.

The action grows out of a lawsuit filed this year by Paulette Harris, an Anne Arundel County woman who said the salon tried to charge her more because she is black.

In that suit, Harris said that a Hair Cuttery employee tried to charge her \$8 extra for her shampoo because of her "ethnic" hair.

Harris also said that she was asked to pay in advance because, she said the staff told her, "ethnic" people tend to leave without paying.

In the class action request filed this week in U.S. District Court, other Baltimore-area women recounted similar experiences at local Hair Cuttery stores.

Hair Cuttery is a walk-in unisex chain with 800 stores, according to its Web site.

Stories and photos from wire services

AFRTS Television Schedule

Updated sports listings are available on the first Scoreboard page in the sports section or AFN's Web site at <http://myafn.dodmedia.osd.mil>

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 26, 2004							
(FPL-FAMILY)	(FPL-MOVIE)	(FPL-EMERGE)	(FPL-ROCK)	(FPL-NEWS)	(FPL-SPORTS)	(FPL-ENTERTAINMENT)	(FPL-PAGE)
9:00 House of Mouse	(9:40) Movie "Double Team" (1994) Jean-Claude Van Damme, Dennis Rodan	Movie "Pitiful Planet" (2004) Ricky Ullman. A hologram sings for a struggling band.	Headline News	Headline News	NBA Basketball Miami Heat at Los Angeles Lakers From State of California in Los Angeles.	Latin Lifestyles	Andromeda Dylan must defeat a false prophet.
9:30 Animaniacs	Ed, Edd n Eddy	Headline News	Headline News	The Chris Matthews Show	Fantasy Can	Urban Style	Headline News
10:00 Fillmore (E)	(2:45) Movie "Untamed" (1997) 1993. Drama. Christian Slater, Marisa Tomei	SpongeBob SquarePants	ESPNs	Navy/Marine Corps News	Rock on the Road	Rock on the Road	ESPNs
11:00 The Newsmen	(12:00) Movie "The Untamed" (1997) 1993. Drama. Christian Slater, Marisa Tomei	Headline News	Headline News	Big Story Weekend Edition	Radical Subculture	All-American Festivals	Smellville "Velocity"
11:30 Planet's Funniest Animals	(12:12) Movie "Roman Holiday" (1953) Gregory Peck, Audrey Hepburn. A princess visiting Rome falls in love with a reporter.	Headline News	Headline News	Headline News	NBA Football	The Size Orman Show	The Notebook Movie Special
12:00 Happy Days "901C"	(12:12) Movie "Roman Holiday" (1953) Gregory Peck, Audrey Hepburn. A princess visiting Rome falls in love with a reporter.	Headline News	Headline News	Headline News	NBA Football	Celebrity Poker Showdown	Ryan Gosling and Rachel McAdams in the drama
12:30 Movie "Full Court Miracle" (2004) (Drama) Allen Liu, Richard T. Jones	(12:12) Movie "Roman Holiday" (1953) Gregory Peck, Audrey Hepburn. A princess visiting Rome falls in love with a reporter.	Headline News	Headline News	Headline News	NBA Football	Headline News	Headline News
14:00 Movie "The Untamed" (1997) 1993. Drama. Christian Slater, Marisa Tomei	(12:12) Movie "Roman Holiday" (1953) Gregory Peck, Audrey Hepburn. A princess visiting Rome falls in love with a reporter.	Headline News	Headline News	Headline News	NBA Football	Headline News	Headline News
15:00 Seven Dwarfs' (1937) Voices: Adriana Caselotti, et al.	(12:12) Movie "Roman Holiday" (1953) Gregory Peck, Audrey Hepburn. A princess visiting Rome falls in love with a reporter.	Headline News	Headline News	Headline News	NBA Football	Headline News	Headline News
16:00 Asha! Real Monsters	(12:12) Movie "Roman Holiday" (1953) Gregory Peck, Audrey Hepburn. A princess visiting Rome falls in love with a reporter.	Headline News	Headline News	Headline News	NBA Football	Headline News	Headline News
16:30 Rocket Power	(12:12) Movie "Roman Holiday" (1953) Gregory Peck, Audrey Hepburn. A princess visiting Rome falls in love with a reporter.	Headline News	Headline News	Headline News	NBA Football	Headline News	Headline News
17:00 Story of Kwanzaa	True Hollywood Story	Andromeda Dylan must defeat false prophet.	Headline News	Headline News	NFL Countdown	The Best Of	ESPNs
17:30 Krait Bros. Be the Creature Show Mondays	NFL Today (Live)	NFL Today (Live)	ESPNs	For NFL Sunday (Live)	Headline News	Good Eats	ESPNs
18:00 America's Funniest Home Videos	NFL Football Regional Coverage - Baltimore at Pittsburgh, Houston at Jacksonville or San Diego at Indianapolis. (Live)	NFL Football Regional Coverage - Atlanta at New Orleans, Chicago at Detroit or New York Giants at Cincinnati. (Live)	FOX News	FOX News	NFL Football Regional Coverage - Atlanta at New Orleans, Chicago at Detroit or New York Giants at Cincinnati. (Live)	My Wife and Kids	FOX NFL Sunday (Live)
19:00 America's Funniest Home Videos	(24) Movie "This Is My Father" (1998, Drama) Adam Quirm, James Chan. A brilliant genius's stem Irish widow's fiery daughter.	NFL Football Regional Coverage - Buffalo Bills at San Francisco 49ers or New England Patriots at New York Jets. (Live)	NFL Football Regional Coverage - Atlanta at New Orleans, Chicago at Detroit or New York Giants at Cincinnati. (Live)	FOX News	NFL Football Regional Coverage - Atlanta at New Orleans, Chicago at Detroit or New York Giants at Cincinnati. (Live)	King of the Hill	NFL Football Regional Coverage - Atlanta at New Orleans, Chicago at Detroit or New York Giants at Cincinnati. (Live)
20:00 America's Funniest Home Videos	(24) Movie "This Is My Father" (1998, Drama) Adam Quirm, James Chan. A brilliant genius's stem Irish widow's fiery daughter.	NFL Football Regional Coverage - Buffalo Bills at San Francisco 49ers or New England Patriots at New York Jets. (Live)	NFL Football Regional Coverage - Atlanta at New Orleans, Chicago at Detroit or New York Giants at Cincinnati. (Live)	FOX News	NFL Football Regional Coverage - Atlanta at New Orleans, Chicago at Detroit or New York Giants at Cincinnati. (Live)	Hope & Faith	NFL Football Regional Coverage - Atlanta at New Orleans, Chicago at Detroit or New York Giants at Cincinnati. (Live)
21:00 America's Funniest Home Videos	(24) Movie "This Is My Father" (1998, Drama) Adam Quirm, James Chan. A brilliant genius's stem Irish widow's fiery daughter.	NFL Football Regional Coverage - Buffalo Bills at San Francisco 49ers or New England Patriots at New York Jets. (Live)	NFL Football Regional Coverage - Atlanta at New Orleans, Chicago at Detroit or New York Giants at Cincinnati. (Live)	FOX News	NFL Football Regional Coverage - Atlanta at New Orleans, Chicago at Detroit or New York Giants at Cincinnati. (Live)	Hope & Faith	NFL Football Regional Coverage - Atlanta at New Orleans, Chicago at Detroit or New York Giants at Cincinnati. (Live)
22:00 America's Funniest Home Videos	(24) Movie "This Is My Father" (1998, Drama) Adam Quirm, James Chan. A brilliant genius's stem Irish widow's fiery daughter.	NFL Football Regional Coverage - Buffalo Bills at San Francisco 49ers or New England Patriots at New York Jets. (Live)	NFL Football Regional Coverage - Atlanta at New Orleans, Chicago at Detroit or New York Giants at Cincinnati. (Live)	FOX News	NFL Football Regional Coverage - Atlanta at New Orleans, Chicago at Detroit or New York Giants at Cincinnati. (Live)	Hope & Faith	NFL Football Regional Coverage - Atlanta at New Orleans, Chicago at Detroit or New York Giants at Cincinnati. (Live)
23:00 America's Funniest Home Videos	(24) Movie "This Is My Father" (1998, Drama) Adam Quirm, James Chan. A brilliant genius's stem Irish widow's fiery daughter.	NFL Football Regional Coverage - Buffalo Bills at San Francisco 49ers or New England Patriots at New York Jets. (Live)	NFL Football Regional Coverage - Atlanta at New Orleans, Chicago at Detroit or New York Giants at Cincinnati. (Live)	FOX News	NFL Football Regional Coverage - Atlanta at New Orleans, Chicago at Detroit or New York Giants at Cincinnati. (Live)	Hope & Faith	NFL Football Regional Coverage - Atlanta at New Orleans, Chicago at Detroit or New York Giants at Cincinnati. (Live)
24:00 America's Funniest Home Videos	(24) Movie "This Is My Father" (1998, Drama) Adam Quirm, James Chan. A brilliant genius's stem Irish widow's fiery daughter.	NFL Football Regional Coverage - Buffalo Bills at San Francisco 49ers or New England Patriots at New York Jets. (Live)	NFL Football Regional Coverage - Atlanta at New Orleans, Chicago at Detroit or New York Giants at Cincinnati. (Live)	FOX News	NFL Football Regional Coverage - Atlanta at New Orleans, Chicago at Detroit or New York Giants at Cincinnati. (Live)	Hope & Faith	NFL Football Regional Coverage - Atlanta at New Orleans, Chicago at Detroit or New York Giants at Cincinnati. (Live)
25:00 America's Funniest Home Videos	(24) Movie "This Is My Father" (1998, Drama) Adam Quirm, James Chan. A brilliant genius's stem Irish widow's fiery daughter.	NFL Football Regional Coverage - Buffalo Bills at San Francisco 49ers or New England Patriots at New York Jets. (Live)	NFL Football Regional Coverage - Atlanta at New Orleans, Chicago at Detroit or New York Giants at Cincinnati. (Live)	FOX News	NFL Football Regional Coverage - Atlanta at New Orleans, Chicago at Detroit or New York Giants at Cincinnati. (Live)	Hope & Faith	NFL Football Regional Coverage - Atlanta at New Orleans, Chicago at Detroit or New York Giants at Cincinnati. (Live)
26:00 America's Funniest Home Videos	(24) Movie "This Is My Father" (1998, Drama) Adam Quirm, James Chan. A brilliant genius's stem Irish widow's fiery daughter.	NFL Football Regional Coverage - Buffalo Bills at San Francisco 49ers or New England Patriots at New York Jets. (Live)	NFL Football Regional Coverage - Atlanta at New Orleans, Chicago at Detroit or New York Giants at Cincinnati. (Live)	FOX News	NFL Football Regional Coverage - Atlanta at New Orleans, Chicago at Detroit or New York Giants at Cincinnati. (Live)	Hope & Faith	NFL Football Regional Coverage - Atlanta at New Orleans, Chicago at Detroit or New York Giants at Cincinnati. (Live)
27:00 America's Funniest Home Videos	(24) Movie "This Is My Father" (1998, Drama) Adam Quirm, James Chan. A brilliant genius's stem Irish widow's fiery daughter.	NFL Football Regional Coverage - Buffalo Bills at San Francisco 49ers or New England Patriots at New York Jets. (Live)	NFL Football Regional Coverage - Atlanta at New Orleans, Chicago at Detroit or New York Giants at Cincinnati. (Live)	FOX News	NFL Football Regional Coverage - Atlanta at New Orleans, Chicago at Detroit or New York Giants at Cincinnati. (Live)	Hope & Faith	NFL Football Regional Coverage - Atlanta at New Orleans, Chicago at Detroit or New York Giants at Cincinnati. (Live)
28:00 America's Funniest Home Videos	(24) Movie "This Is My Father" (1998, Drama) Adam Quirm, James Chan. A brilliant genius's stem Irish widow's fiery daughter.	NFL Football Regional Coverage - Buffalo Bills at San Francisco 49ers or New England Patriots at New York Jets. (Live)	NFL Football Regional Coverage - Atlanta at New Orleans, Chicago at Detroit or New York Giants at Cincinnati. (Live)	FOX News	NFL Football Regional Coverage - Atlanta at New Orleans, Chicago at Detroit or New York Giants at Cincinnati. (Live)	Hope & Faith	NFL Football Regional Coverage - Atlanta at New Orleans, Chicago at Detroit or New York Giants at Cincinnati. (Live)
29:00 America's Funniest Home Videos	(24) Movie "This Is My Father" (1998, Drama) Adam Quirm, James Chan. A brilliant genius's stem Irish widow's fiery daughter.	NFL Football Regional Coverage - Buffalo Bills at San Francisco 49ers or New England Patriots at New York Jets. (Live)	NFL Football Regional Coverage - Atlanta at New Orleans, Chicago at Detroit or New York Giants at Cincinnati. (Live)	FOX News	NFL Football Regional Coverage - Atlanta at New Orleans, Chicago at Detroit or New York Giants at Cincinnati. (Live)	Hope & Faith	NFL Football Regional Coverage - Atlanta at New Orleans, Chicago at Detroit or New York Giants at Cincinnati. (Live)
30:00 America's Funniest Home Videos	(24) Movie "This Is My Father" (1998, Drama) Adam Quirm, James Chan. A brilliant genius's stem Irish widow's fiery daughter.	NFL Football Regional Coverage - Buffalo Bills at San Francisco 49ers or New England Patriots at New York Jets. (Live)	NFL Football Regional Coverage - Atlanta at New Orleans, Chicago at Detroit or New York Giants at Cincinnati. (Live)	FOX News	NFL Football Regional Coverage - Atlanta at New Orleans, Chicago at Detroit or New York Giants at Cincinnati. (Live)	Hope & Faith	NFL Football Regional Coverage - Atlanta at New Orleans, Chicago at Detroit or New York Giants at Cincinnati. (Live)
31:00 America's Funniest Home Videos	(24) Movie "This Is My Father" (1998, Drama) Adam Quirm, James Chan. A brilliant genius's stem Irish widow's fiery daughter.	NFL Football Regional Coverage - Buffalo Bills at San Francisco 49ers or New England Patriots at New York Jets. (Live)	NFL Football Regional Coverage - Atlanta at New Orleans, Chicago at Detroit or New York Giants at Cincinnati. (Live)	FOX News	NFL Football Regional Coverage - Atlanta at New Orleans, Chicago at Detroit or New York Giants at Cincinnati. (Live)	Hope & Faith	NFL Football Regional Coverage - Atlanta at New Orleans, Chicago at Detroit or New York Giants at Cincinnati. (Live)
32:00 America's Funniest Home Videos	(24) Movie "This Is My Father" (1998, Drama) Adam Quirm, James Chan. A brilliant genius's stem Irish widow's fiery daughter.	NFL Football Regional Coverage - Buffalo Bills at San Francisco 49ers or New England Patriots at New York Jets. (Live)	NFL Football Regional Coverage - Atlanta at New Orleans, Chicago at Detroit or New York Giants at Cincinnati. (Live)	FOX News	NFL Football Regional Coverage - Atlanta at New Orleans, Chicago at Detroit or New York Giants at Cincinnati. (Live)	Hope & Faith	NFL Football Regional Coverage - Atlanta at New Orleans, Chicago at Detroit or New York Giants at Cincinnati. (Live)
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QI hear that Olympic gold-medal skater Brian Boitano had knee surgery. How's he doing? — Michael J., Spokane, Wash.

A"I was off the ice for three months before the surgery but feel great now," Boitano, 41, told us from his San Francisco home. "When I can't do the jumps and spread eagles that my fans expect, I'll hang up my skates." You can see him Jan. 1 on NBC in the eighth annual "Brian Boitano Skating Spectacular" from Las Vegas.



KRT

Recently divorced Rebecca Romijn has found love again with Jerry O'Connell, her co-star in "The Alibi."

QHas Rebecca Romijn found love since divorcing John Stamos? — Scott Harris, Denton, Texas

AIt sure looks that way. Rebecca, 32, has hooked up with another actor — Jerry O'Connell, 30, now appearing as a detective on NBC's "Crossing Jordan." The lovebirds began dating seriously last summer while filming "The Alibi," and both recently finished shooting "Man About Town," starring Ben Affleck.

QPresident Bush called Karl Rove "the architect" of his re-election. Any personal info on Rove? — John Cunningham, Aptos, Calif.

AMr. Bush has several nicknames for Rove, 54, including "Boy Genius" and "Turd Blossom" (because, a friend explains, "something is sure to pop up" when Karl is around). A multimillionaire from his days in the direct-mail business, Rove lives in Washington, D.C., with his wife, Darby, and son, Andrew, 15.

QWhat are the odds that two of my favorites, Harrison Ford and Sharon Stone, will reprise their most famous roles — Ford as Indiana Jones and Stone in "Basic Instinct"? — Leonard Boris, Trenton, N.J.

AWe're told that financing has been secured for "Basic Instinct 2," and a script is being written for a fourth Indiana Jones adventure. But time waits for no man — or woman. At 62, Ford may be getting too old to crack the whip. And, at 46, Stone looks great but may be a little stiff when she crosses her legs.

QPlease settle a bet among friends. We know G.A. McKevett, author of the Savannah Reid mysteries, is the pen name of a noted writer but can't agree who. Is it Mary Higgins Clark, Sue Grafton or Janet Evanovich? — Linda Mulaney, Middle River, Md.

ANone of the above. G.A. McKevett — whose weight-conscious heroine has solved nine mysteries with such gastronomic titles as "Peaches and Screams" — is really Sonja Massie, who has penned dozens of steamy romance novels under her own name. McKevett's 10th case, "Murder à la Mode," is due out next month.

QI heard that some of The Rolling Stones have medical problems. Will that affect their future? — Rick Ryan, Media, Pa.

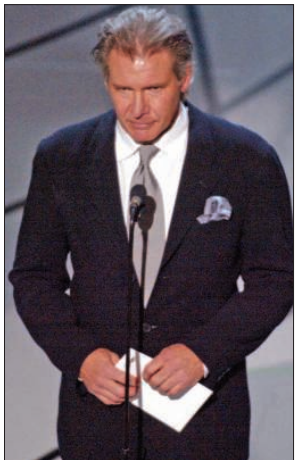
AAt their age, it's hard to say. Drummer Charlie Watts, 63, is doing well after treatment for throat cancer. Guitarist Ronnie Wood, the baby in the band at 57, has done stints in rehab for alcohol. They have no immediate plans to tour, but the Stones — Watts and Wood plus Mick Jagger and Keith Richards, both 61 — are working on a new album for 2005.

QThe Bobby Darin biopic, "Beyond the Sea," made me wonder: How's Sandra Dee doing? — Kay Nolan, Chicago, Ill.

A"Mom is still beautiful and feisty at 60, despite medical concerns [she's on kidney dialysis]," says Dodd Darin, 43, the only child from the couple's 1960-67 marriage. "She was speechless after a private showing of 'Beyond the Sea' and thought it was a fitting legacy to Dad, who died of a heart condition in 1973 at age 37. I have not seen her so jazzed about anything in a long time."



AP



KRT

Sharon Stone and Harrison Ford might not get an opportunity to reprise their best-known roles.



HBO

There's no end in sight for the increasingly aged Rolling Stones, though hard living has to catch up with them sometime.

QI haven't seen the Sweeten kids on "Everybody Loves Raymond" since your item on them a few months back. Where have they been? — Ruth Rainford, West Windsor, N.J.

AThe Sweetens — Madylin, 13, and twins Sullivan and Sawyer, 9 — missed the first few episodes of the season due to contract negotiations. But they've appeared recently (and get paid even if they don't work). "They're available for new shows when 'Raymond' quits production this spring," their mom, Lizz, tells us. "But they'll be fine whether they're on TV or not."

QIs Laurie Dhue of the Fox News Channel just another pretty face, or is she a real journalist? — Charles A. Harrington, Boynton Beach, Fla.

ADhue, 36, may look like a Barbie doll, but the former ACNN and MSNBC anchor has the curiosity and drive of a "real journalist." She could be sitting in a New York studio reading headlines, but Dhue begged to be sent to an overseas hot spot. She got her wish and now reports from Israel.

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YOUR MONEY

Education financing alternatives for Navy spouses

Type	Name	Range	Given by
Grants (Don't have to be paid back)	Pell	\$400 to \$4,000 a year	Federal government
	Federal Supplemental Education Opportunity Grant (FSEOG)	\$100 to \$4,000 a year	Federal government through schools
	State	Variable	States
	Spouse Tuition Aid Program (Overseas only)	\$1,500/yr undergraduate	Navy-Marine Corps Relief
	Scholarships	\$1,750/yr graduate	Non profits, corporations, schools
		Variable	Non profits, corporations
Loans (Need to be paid back)	Stafford	\$2,625, \$3,500 and \$5,500	Federal govt. through banks
	Perkins	Up to \$4,000	Federal govt. through schools
	Private	Variable	Non profits, corporations
Other	Federal Work-Study Program	Variable	Schools
	Secured loan	Variable	Bank/credit union
	Home-equity loan	Variable	Bank/credit union
	Credit cards	Variable	Banks

Stars and Stripes

There are ways to find time, money for school

Susie Besaw, from the book "The Savvy Sailor's Spouse," is new to the military lifestyle but is eager to learn more about how to manage her family and her new lifestyle through the monthly Family Readiness Group meetings of her husband Jack's new command.

After the break, Bob continued talking about how Susie could reach her education goals. "Remember we are working backward to achieve Susie's goal of building custom databases with her own company. We have an idea of how much she won't make if she decides not to go back to school. We also have a good estimate of what it will cost for her degree. Assuming we've found her the right school, let's figure out how she's going to pay for it. Anybody have any ideas how to pay for a degree?"

Money U.

"Put it on a credit card," a sailor in the back joked.

"Possibly, as a last resort," Bob replied with a smile. "But there are less expensive ways."

"Here's a handout on college financing, including grants — which do not have to be repaid, and loans — which have to be repaid usually with interest deferred until graduation."

"Let's walk through a summary of these different alternatives and try to figure out how Susie is going to find the money she needs to finish her degree."

"Remember, families are granted financial governmental aid based primarily on their Expected Family Contribution, or EFC, a calculation performed by the Free Application for Federal Student Aid, or FAFSA. Students must submit an FAFSA in order to apply for Federal Pell Grants, Perkins Loan, Stafford Loans, work study, and support from state and nonstate schools."

"Where can I get a FAFSA?" someone asked. "You can download them from the Web," Bob said.

"Is there any tuition assistance for spouses like there is for servicemembers?" Sharyn Sun, our membership chair, asked.

"No," Bob replied. "There is no military support organization such as Navy Relief — and then, it's usually not enough to cover everything. That's why I made this chart of both public and private sources." "Are we limited to one source of financing or can we combine the different grants, loans and other sources to cover costs?" Sharyn asked.

"You can get financial assistance from multiple

For the time-strapped

Through the miracle of the Internet, there is an easier way to earn a degree called distance learning. Thousands of people earn their college degrees each year using online education. Distance learning was developed specifically to provide the flexibility needed to fit the busy schedules of students trying to manage a career or family, including military spouses.

When you are deciding on which school to attend, consider the following:

■ Accreditation. Is the school regionally or nationally accredited and do the instructors hold appropriate degrees? If not, the school may be a diploma mill. Avoid diploma mills. They love to take advantage of servicemembers, their spouses, and others who don't research them thoroughly.

■ Student evaluations. You want to be evaluated on a regular basis. If you're not, you may be caught up in a diploma mill. What good is a degree if you are not being graded?

■ Research materials. Make sure the school offers plenty of easy-to-find and use research materials for your coursework. You don't want to be searching everywhere to finish your assignments.

■ Course content. Make sure you are getting the full learning experience instead of just completing reading assignments.

■ Student/teacher interaction. Are you going to be interacting with your professor and other students? Make sure you can use chat rooms, instant messaging, teleconferencing, and maybe even video conferencing and that the technology works.

— Ralph Nelson

sources," Bob replied. "That's what many students have to do. Let's talk about the different financing options, starting with grants."

"The federally awarded Pell Grant is between \$400 to \$4,000 a year — awarded based on your EFC, the cost of attendance and your enrollment status. It's awarded to the neediest undergraduate students who have not yet earned a bachelor's or higher degree."

"The Federal Supplemental Education Opportunity Grant, or FSEOG, is a \$100 to \$4,000 per school year campus-based grant — meaning the college gives it — and is awarded to the neediest undergraduate students who have not yet earned a bachelor's or professional degree."

SEE EDUCATION ON PAGE 25

Stores mull wine to loosen wallets

BY AMY MERRICK

The Wall Street Journal

When the two women first stopped by Boagaloos Boutique one recent night, they didn't buy anything. When the pair returned to Penny Scheetz's store three hours later, they were a tad tipsy.

One lingered over a cable-knit sweater with a snowflake design. "Go ahead," Scheetz overheard one woman urging her friend. "You've done worse things when you were drunk. Just buy it."

She did, for \$110. It was Thursday in Decatur, Ga., the night of the town's weekly Terrific Thursday party. A yellow school bus upholstered with wild-colored fur, paid for by the city, transported shoppers around the downtown shopping district. At some stores, they enjoyed appetizers — and glasses of wine.

Small urban shopping areas have long tried to keep shoppers from visiting faraway malls or larger chains by opening late and offering sizable discounts. Now, many across the country are adding something extra to keep the cash tills lubricated: a drink or two, or three.

A month ago, Melissa Daniel, a 28-year-old technology consultant in Chicago, hit an evening holiday party at a trendy brasserie and boutique called 301 Leavenworth. She recalls toasting back two glasses of champagne, without eating dinner, "and suddenly everything started looking good." She ended up with two sweaters costing \$100 each. Two weeks later, she went to a sample-sale party, held by a merchandise manager at more champagne, and bought a \$200 discounted Gucci duffel bag that hadn't seemed necessary when she was sober.

"I always like everything I buy," she says. "I just end up spending more than I planned."

The downtown shopping district of Quincy, Ill., which was losing customers to nearby Springfield and St. Louis, has turned Christmas shopping into a social event. Stores serve champagne during the December "Cash and Champagne" shopping evening, which started about five years ago. Outside, the eight-block, historic area is decorated with luminarias — sand-filled paper bags lit by a candle — Christmas wreaths and music.

"Ladies come in their fur coats for the evening," says Karol Ehmen, executive director of the Historic Quincy Business District.

Ehmen has shared the idea with other communities. Some say their customers wouldn't be attracted by free alcohol. She suggests they give out chocolate instead.

The laws governing who can serve alcohol vary dramatically among states. Often, they're also subject to the interpretation of local liquor boards. In Illinois, for example, it's illegal to give away alcohol, except at private parties. In Texas, stores can give away alcohol if they don't charge an entry fee. In New Jersey, a store would need to hire a caterer.

Other ticklish problems arise.



Columbia University students Katie Czewski, left, and Elizabeth Cedars take a break from shopping in front of H&M's holiday window in New York last week. In an effort to attract customers — and pull them away from larger competitors — some boutiques are offering incentives like free wine and chocolates.

Some shops have been known to cut off customers in mid-spending, and drinking. At a fall 2003 private shopping party at a boutique called Armorie, owner Nan Hager watched one intoxicated woman pick out \$1,200 in clothes and jewelry. Hager insisted she leave the goods behind at the Bradenton, Fla., store, and call back the next day when she was sober. In the end, the shopper stuck with her order.

Camille Wright, owner of the Kaleidoscope Boutique in Decatur, serves only clear-colored drinks, just in case there are any spills. Wright says her customers are mostly well-behaved, although she recalls last fall that one drunken shopper spent \$1,500 on a fur-trimmed coat, jeans and other clothes after a visit to a city beer festival.

The bad news for smaller stores is that their larger competitors are trying the same trick. Two weeks ago in Chicago, Beniman Marcus stationed bartenders throughout its four-story building to serve customers attending the "InCircle" shopping party for big spenders.

Brendon Frank wasn't expecting a tipple when he showed up at Banana Republic's flagship San Francisco store last December.

Five glasses later, the 28-year-old cancer researcher had added to his girlfriend's Christmas loot. He spent \$50 more than he intended. Frank reckons the value of the champagne he drank outweighed the cost of the merchandise. "I ended up coming out ahead," he claims.

YOUR VOICE Signs of 'debtbing' premen

Q: I am a licensed therapist who has filed for bankruptcy three times so far — two Chapter 7 liquidations and one Chapter 13 repayment plan. If I make \$150,000 a year, I spend every single dollar. What can I do to get my credit back and stop this madness?

A: You've used the correct word to describe your condition, all right.

Repeatedly spending yourself into bankruptcy is a kind of insanity and one that's probably not treatable with a financial self-help book or two.

Many people wind up in bankruptcy court after a serious financial setback, such as uninsured medical bills or a job loss. Their bankruptcies are a once-in-a-lifetime event; they learn from their mistakes and move on. By contrast, you've dug the same hole three times and still think you'll somehow be able to handle credit in the future.

Stals of your fellow citizens would consider you to be an abuser of the bankruptcy system, but the real victim is you. You probably haven't been able to accumulate much in the way of assets or wealth, anything you had has probably long since been seized to pay your creditors.

Whatever is driving your compulsive consumerism needs serious treatment. Therapy is one option; so is a 12-step program like Debtors Anonymous.

DA is based on the principals of Alcoholics Anonymous and identifies the following as some of the signs of what it calls "compulsive debtbing":

- Being unclear about your financial situation, such as not knowing your checking account balance or being clueless about your monthly expenses.
- Frequently "borrowing" money or money from

friends and failing to return them.

- Poor savings habits and failing to plan for taxes, retirement and other predictable expenses.

■ Compulsive shopping, including impulse purchases and using a bargain, making impulse purchases and not using items you've purchased.

- Difficulty in meeting basic obligations, and an inordinate sense of accomplishment when such obligations are met.

■ Getting a different feeling when buying on credit instead of cash, such as feeling of being "in the club." Living in chaos and financial stress.

■ Taking financial risks, including going without health and car insurance or writing checks hoping money will appear to cover them.

■ Unwarranted inhibition and embarrassment in what should be a normal discussion of money.

■ Overworking or underearning, such as working extra hours to earn money to pay creditors.

If any of these signs ring a bell, you might want to get more information from the Debtors Anonymous Web site at www.debtorsanonymous.org or call (781) 453-2743.

The good news is that you can treat this problem and keep the madness at bay. The bad news is that you may have to give up the idea of having unlimited credit ever again. If you think about it, though, that's a pretty small price for having sanity returned to your life.

Liz Pulliam Weston is the author of "Your Credit Score: How to Fix, Improve and Protect the 3-Digit Number That Shapes Your Financial Future" for Money Talk and can be contacted via her Web site, <http://www.lizweston.com>, although she regrets that she cannot respond personally to queries.

Money Talk



Liz Pulliam Weston

Education: Financial aid options are available

EDUCATION, FROM PAGE 24

"The Navy-Marine Corps Relief offers the Spouse Tuition Aid Program, or STAP, to on-base Navy spouses who are residing with their active-duty service members. STAP is a grant of up to 50 percent of tuition for on-base education programs, up to a maximum of \$300 per undergraduate term, \$1,500 per academic year, \$3,000 per academic year, \$1,750 per academic year. Full-time attendance is not required and graduate studies are supported."

"Navy spouses may be awarded a scholarship based on community or civic service, extra-curricular achievements, career aspirations, the spouse's or parents' employer and organizational memberships. The scholarship amounts awarded are all over the map, and you may need to apply for them every year you are in school."

"If grants and scholarships don't cover costs, you should line up loans. The problem with loans is they have to be paid back."

"Are education loans expensive?" Mary McCarthy, our treasurer, asked.

"Navy spouses usually have low interest rates," Bob answered.

"The Stafford Loan is a popular federal-based loan that you may or may not need to pay interest on while in school. First-year students can borrow up to \$2,625 on Stafford Loans; second-year students can borrow \$3,500; and third-year students can borrow \$5,500. The amount borrowed is determined after subtracting Pell Grants and other aid from the cost of attending school."

"The Perkins Loan is another education loan the government offers. The amount you can borrow is based on the school you are attending. These are available for undergraduate and graduate students through your school's financial aid office and are based on exceptional need. Loans can be given directly to the student or applied toward the student's tuition. The specific amount of the award — up to \$4,000 — will be determined by the school."

mined when the student applies based on financial need and the amount of money the school has available that year.

"One advantage of the Perkins Loan is your debt won't start repaying it until nine months after you graduate, leave school or when your course load drops below part time. The federal government pays the interest on the Perkins loan while you are in school and during the nine-month grace period. You also have 10 years to repay the loan."

"The Total Federal Work-Study award depends on when you apply, your level of need and the funding level of your school. If you're an undergraduate, if you're a graduate student, you might receive a salary."

"Finally, if you still need more financial aid, you may borrow from the private sector, but you have to use your own application process and these loans vary depending upon your degree type."

"What if I need more to finish my degree?" the sailor asked.

"If you still need more," Bob replied, "you may borrow from credit unions where you can borrow against a savings account. If you own a home, you can borrow against your home's value through a home-equity loan. This is referred to as a secured loan."

"Your last option — to be considered only after all other avenues have been exhausted — is credit cards. But these loans carry high interest rates as you all may know."

Copies of Ralph Nelson's books — "The Savvy Sailor" and "The Savvy Naval Officer" — can be purchased by writing to Master Sgt. Ralph Nelson, 10000 P.O. Box 10071, Rockville, MD 20849 or online at www.savvyweb.com. This article is based on information sold with the understanding that neither the author nor Stars and Stripes are professional financial advisers. If you need advice, please seek professional assistance. The author specifically disclaims any liability, loss or risk, personal or otherwise — incurred as a consequence, directly or indirectly, of using or applying the information contained in this article or the book. E-mail for feedback is finance@starsandstripes.osd.mil

FRIDAY'S MARKET SUMMARY

INDEXES				
52-week	Low	High	Net	% YTD
Low	High	Low	High	Chg Sp
10,827.60	9,708.00	Dow Jones Industrial	10,827.12	+11.51
3,803.75	2,743.46	Dow Jones Transportation	3,767.78	+2.84
1,541.11	1,041.11	Dow Jones Utilities	1,541.11	+1.11
7,179.18	6,171.85	NASDAQ Composite	7,208.78	+18.64
1,437.69	1,118.28	NYSE Index	1,417.75	+9.56
1,750.82	1,550.82	Nasdaq Composite	1,750.82	+5.59
1,211.62	1,050.72	S&P 500	1,210.13	+5.56
658.67	548.29	Russell 2000	658.41	+7.76
68.75	51.55	Russell 2000	68.47	+3.11
11,328.51	10,263.52	DJ Wilshire 5000	11,333.81	+4.81

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EXCHANGE RATES

Military rates	
Dollar buys (Dec. 27)	\$1.3812
British pound (Dec. 27)	67.74
Japanese yen (Dec. 27)	102.00
South Korean won (Dec. 27)	1,020.00
Commercial rates	
Bahrain (Dinar)	1.3777
British pound	1.5144
Canada (Dollar)	1.2442
Denmark (Krone)	0.5568
Egypt (Pound)	0.2224
Hong Kong (Dollar)	0.7812
Turkey (Lira)	1.3788
Israel (Shekel)	0.1925
Japan (Yen)	104.98
Kuwait (Dinar)	0.2946
Norway (Krone)	0.1514
Philippines (Peso)	1.6396
Saudi Arabia (Riyal)	0.2688
Singapore (Dollar)	1.4444
South Korea (Won)	1.0200
Switzerland (Franc)	0.7521
Thailand (Baht)	0.0093
Turkey (Lira)	1.3788
Military exchange rates are those available to customers at the nearest bank in the country of issuance.	
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Parents and Sensibility Money tip of the day

Web sites for kids

BY NANCY DUNNAN
Kids go links to over 400 Web sites from government agencies to school and educational organizations, all geared to the learning level and interest of kids.
The site teaches kids about doing homework, picking a career, exploring outer space, cre-

ating an art project, taking care of a puppy. It also covers bus safety, traffic rules, riding a bike or on a horse. And there are wonderful games, stories, puzzles and short animated movies.
Financial adviser, economist and security analyst Nancy Dunnan is the author of "How to Invest \$5,000." She writes a weekly column for theonlineinvestor.com

Discover why
so many people
are saying...

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SEC

Sunday Horoscope

Happy Kwanzaa and Happy Boxing Day! It's a stellar day for acknowledging the people in your life who make things easier on a daily basis. With the full moon in Cancer, insecurity runs rampant, and grand gestures provide much-needed reassurance. Fortune befalls you when you remember people who will smile tokens of affection and big tips.

TODAY'S BIRTHDAY (December 26). You're at the height of your popularity this year, being accepted for parts of yourself you used to hide. It's more fun to be completely honest anyway! The shifts in your financial sector during January make way for a new influx of work — probably something you'll need some training to accomplish. New love with Scorpio or Gemini is passionate.

ARIES (March 21-April 19). The stars appoint you the cruise director. So when family and friends come to you with black eyes, begging to be led in the direction of fun, be ready with suggestions. You'll be amazed how influential you are.

TAURUS (April 20-May 20). Where you need from others is to offer safe and comfortable? The answers aren't on the tip of your tongue, but start talking anyway. When you bounce ideas off the right person, the light bulb over your head turns on.

GEMINI (May 21-June 21). Recent events have enlightened you but have not caused you to be jaded. It's brilliant how you're able to hold on to your innocent wonder even when you know that this magic is all done with smoke and mirrors.

CANCER (June 22-July 22). Emotional complexities vex others — not you. You understand that not every problem is meant to be solved. Friends compete for you. There's room for more than one number on your speed dial.

LEO (July 23-Aug. 22). Relationships aren't exactly glassy smooth now. But if you have to swim through some muck to get to

love's lush island, you're willing to get a little dirty. True friendship and the promise of romance are worth the effort.

VIRGO (Aug. 23-Sept. 22). Just now you thought you could relax, the bell rings, signaling that your break is over. Take comfort in the fact that the "work" you're doing is very much appreciated by your dear ones, and they'll tell you so, too.

LIBRA (Sept. 23-Oct. 23). Your mind is processing multiple layers of meaning from all of your surroundings. You'll see many symbols around you and wonder what they are symbolizing. Maybe someone, maybe nothing. It's up to you.

SCORPIO (Oct. 24-Nov. 21). You would feel terrible if you knew your actions were really bothering someone. But the fact that this person isn't willing to speak up is your free pass. Consider bringing underlying tension out in the open.

SAGITTARIUS (Nov. 22-Dec. 21). There are numerous benefits to be had by taking part in doing absolutely nothing. You do so passionately, almost actively. Doing nothing with a friend is even more fulfilling.

CAPRICORN (Dec. 22-Jan. 19). Whatever the interruption, you turn it to your benefit. You'll be amazed when a responsibility is lifted or when a friend bails on you, leaving you plenty of time to ponder the meaning of life.

AQUARIUS (Jan. 20-Feb. 18). You were promised that something would come, but the exact nature of that something was left vague. In fact, you have no idea what to expect. The suspense may not be killing you, but it is making you a bit anxious.

PISCES (Feb. 19-March 20). You're a witness. You didn't mean to be or want to be, but now you are. What to do with your accidental knowledge is the question. Turning it into a secret and carrying it around is an option, but it will get awfully heavy.

Creators Syndicate

Sickum! He just doesn't get it!

Dear Editor: Years ago, my father-in-law used to say of his neighbor "he doesn't know sickum." More recently, I've been hearing this expression in the form of "he doesn't know sickum twice." What on earth does this mean? Did it come from England, as did my father-in-law, or is it an American concoction? —H.L. Jackson, Mich.

Dear H.L.: The expression you've heard is more often written as "doesn't know sic 'em," and it is in fact an Americanism. No one is sure exactly how old it is, but "sic 'em" in this context means "anything."

The expression derives from the command of attack given to dogs, which is a modification of the pronunciation of "seek

(th)em" or "seek (h)im." (The command is 150 years old or more.) When people say that someone "doesn't know sic 'em," they are, in effect, proclaiming that the person to be as ignorant as a dog who doesn't recognize the command "sic 'em," or perhaps as shiftless and lazy as a dog who doesn't respond to the command. Including the word "twice" at the end of the line merely serves to emphasize the meaning of the insult, indicating that the person is like a dog who doesn't understand the command even when given it twice.

This column was prepared by the editors of Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary, Tenth Edition. Readers may send questions to Merriam-Webster's Wordwatch, P.O. Box 261, 47 Federal St., Springfield, Mass. 01102.

Battered wife sues for removal of spouse's abuses to police

Dear Abby: A month ago, I celebrated my 10th wedding anniversary. My husband and I have been together for 12 years. He didn't lay a hand on me until a year ago.

We got into an argument on Valentine's Day, and he slapped me twice that night. It happened again last month. We separated after the second incident, but I couldn't afford to move out because I've been a stay-at-home mom for six years.

Tonight he had a minor spat, and he broke my nose. An hour later, his 21-year-old girlfriend drove over and picked him up, and here my 7-year-old son and I sit, while he not only gets sympathy, but also companionship and sex.

Abby, please tell young women that getting involved with married men isn't just stupid; it's dangerous — and often to the woman he's married to when the single woman comes into his life.

Dear Bruised: I'm broadcasting your message, but don't expect much response. Men who cheat on their wives are not about doing to their girlfriends. No doubt he has filled her head with what a terrible wife you are

and how unhappy you have made him. That's the "lure" to snag her in the role of "rescuer."

Perhaps you should warn her so she doesn't become victim No. 2. Since a picture is worth a thousand words, have some taken of you before your bruises heal. The police should also be contacted, and the battery put on record.

Dear Abby



Dear Abby: My husband and I have one child, and we have decided that we are having no more. People frequently ask when we're having another child, and when we say "Never!" they always

demand to know why. When we tell them our reasons, they go on and on about how they shouldn't make our little girl an only child and how "crucial" it would be to have

What can we say to politely end everyone's incessant need to criticize us for not having more children? Do you agree that this is a rude question?

—**Having Fun with One in N.Y.**
DEAR HAVING FUN: I certainly do, because that question is often painful to answer. You might catch less flak if instead of saying "Never!" you reply as my friend Sherry does. She says,

Painful sibling rivalry is back for pair of middle-aged men

Dear Annie: My older sister and I have reverted to our childhood sibling rivalry with a vengeance, and I don't know what to do about it.

We are both middle-aged women, so I cannot imagine why we have gotten past this. "Dotty" is a considerate and kind person toward everyone she knows, except me. Her snide remarks, her unreasonable anger, and especially her negative comments about me to my husband have made me distrust her. I feel that she does not wish me well. As a result, I have decided that I cannot have her in my life, even though I have no other family. Being around her is damaging to my emotional health.

Please help me understand why this has resurfaced in our lives at this late stage and whether I have any other way to resolve this problem other than to avoid her entirely.

The Baby Sister Again
Dear Baby Sister: Obviously, Dotty has some sibling issues that she has never worked through. Chances are she also has other problems in her life right now, and reverting to her childhood behavior is how she is dealing with them. Unless she is willing to seek counseling and understand her resentment, nothing will change. Before cutting the ties, give

Dotty one last chance. Tell her you love her, but her negative attitude undermines the bond you share. Ask if she will consider talking to a third party (perhaps a clergywoman, counselor or mutual friend), so you can work on the problem together.

If she refuses, at least you will know you made the effort.

Annie's Mailbox



Dear Annie: I am 24, and my dad passed away when I was 12. A few years ago, Mom remarried, but it ended in a friendly divorce. Mom isn't the most outgoing person, but she is great company once you get to know her. The problem is that my sisters and I have our own lives and friends, and we feel guilty that Mom is alone.

Mom is the only one of her friends who is single. Is there anything we can do to help her get out and meet some new people?

—**Chicago Daughter**
Dear Daughter: First, make sure your mom truly wants help. If she is indeed looking for company, encourage her to do volunteer work, join a choir or book club, take salsa lessons, work on a political campaign, etc. When your mother meets people with similar interests, she can make new connections.

"I had the first one. It's up to my husband to have the second." That usually stops 'em.

Dear Abby: I think my sister has an eating disorder.

She's rail-thin and is always watching her calorie intake. My concern is that she does it with my 3-year-old nephew, too.

She has the child on a strict diet, counting his carb and calorie intake. Her little boy is still eating baby food (made for ages 6 to 9 months), and I'm afraid he will develop an eating disorder, too. What can I do?

—**Worried Aunt in Virginia**

Dear Worried Aunt: Children have very different nutritional needs than adults, and your sister needs to be aware of that when she feeds her child. Encourage your sister to consult her son's pediatrician about the eating program her child is on to assure he's getting the nutrients he needs for optimum brain and body development. A session with a dietitian who's credentialed by the American Dietetic Association would also be a good idea. (They have "R.D." after their names.)

Letters for this column — with your name and phone number — should be addressed to Dear Abby, P.O. Box #940, Los Angeles, CA 90069. Readers can write to Abby on the Internet at <http://www.abbymail.com/dearabby>. Universal Press Syndicate

Painful sibling rivalry is back for pair of middle-aged men

Dear Annie: I am 14 years old and read your column every day. The question I have does not concern me, but my friend "Emily." Emily is loved by only a few months, and we are quite alike, except for one thing. Emily has a problem with perspiration under her arms.

This problem started about six months ago. Since then, it has caused her repeated embarrassment, discomfort and even a few ruined shirts. She's tried what I would call everything, but it seems to make it worse. She's taken to wearing toilet paper under her arms to keep it under control, though it never stops. I'm very concerned about Emily because she can hardly stand to go out anywhere. She's not living her life because of it. I'm hoping you can help.

—**Concerned Friend in the USA**
Dear Concerned Friend: Emily is suffering from hyperhidrosis, or excessive perspiration, and she needs to see a doctor for the appropriate treatment. So gently and kindly talk to her parents and ask them to make an appointment. Emily is lucky to have a friend like you. Go ahead and reassure her that her social life is not over.

Annie's Mailbox is written by Kathy Mitchell and Marcy Sugar, longtime co-authors of the Los Angeles Times. Please e-mail your questions to annie@mail.comcast.net, or write to: Annie's Mailbox, c/o Crossroads Locust, 5777 W. Century Blvd., Suite 700, Los Angeles, CA 90045.

Creators Syndicate

RELIGION

Why is Christmas always on December 25?

Explanations compete about Christmas Day

BY RICHARD N. OSTLING
The Associated Press



The Nativity as depicted by French artist Paul Gustave Dore for his 1865 book, "The Bible." There are competing explanations regarding why Christmas is celebrated on December 25.

In simultaneous pre-Christmas cover stories, Time and Newsweek magazines sifted with skepticism the narratives of Jesus' birth in Matthew and Luke, the only accounts we have since no other chroniclers recorded this obscure peasant's nativity. It's far less important than those historical debates, but there's also a small disagreement about why the church later chose Dec. 25 for Christmas. Two main theories compete.

One notes that in A.D. 274, the Roman Emperor Aurelian inaugurated Dec. 25 as the pagan "Birth of the Unconquered Sun" celebration, at the calendar point when daylight began to lengthen.

Supposedly, Christians then borrowed the date and devised Christmas to compete with paganism.

Aurelian's empire seemed near collapse, so his festival proclaimed imperial and pagan rejuvenation. Prior to 274, there's no record of a major sun cult at the Northern Hemisphere's winter solstice (the year's shortest day, which actually occurs before Dec. 25).

William Tighe, a church history specialist at Pennsylvania's Muhlenberg College, champions the exsultia opposite theory.

Aurelian almost certainly created "a pagan alternative to a date that was already of some significance to Roman Christians," Tighe wrote last December in Touchstone, a Chicago-based magazine for Catholic, Orthodox and Protestant traditionalists. True, the Christians later appropriated Aurelian's festival into their Christmas.

But Dec. 25 "appears to owe nothing whatsoever to pagan influences," Tighe asserted. He said the pagans' first theory originated only these centuries ago in the writings of Protestant historian Paul Ernst Jablonski and Catholic monk Jean Hardouin.

The Tighe acknowledged that the first hard evidence of Christmas occurring on Dec. 25 isn't found until A.D. 336 and the date only became a fixed festival in Constantinople in 379.

However, the definitive "Handbook of Biblical Chronology" by professor Jack Finegan (Hendrickson, 1998 revised edition) cites an important refer-

ence in the "Chronicle" written by Hippolytus of Rome three decades before Aurelian launched his festival.

Hippolytus said Jesus' birth "took place eight days before the kalends of January," that is, Dec. 25. Tighe said there's evidence that as early as the second and third centuries, Christians sought to fix the birth date to help determine the time of Jesus' death and resurrection for the liturgical calendar — long before Christmas also became a festival.

The New Testament Gospels say the Crucifixion happened at the Jewish Passover season. The "integral age" concept, taught by ancient Judaism though not in the Bible, held that Israel's great prophets died the same day as their birth or conception.

Quite early on, Tighe said, Christians applied this idea to Jesus and set the Passover period's March 25 for the Feast of the Annunciation, marking the angel Gabriel's announcement to Mary that she would give birth. And nine months to the conception date and we get Dec. 25.

Chrysostom had further argued that modern scholars ignore: Luke 1 says Zechariah was performing priestly duty in the Temple when an angel told his wife Elizabeth she would bear John the Baptist. During the sixth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy, Mary learned about her conception of Jesus and visited Elizabeth "with haste."

The 24 classes of Jewish priests served one week in the Temple, and Zechariah was in the eighth class. Rabbinical tradition fixed the class on duty when the Temple was destroyed in A.D. 70 and, calculating backward from that, Zechariah's class would have been serving Oct. 2-9 in 5 B.C. So Mary's conception visit six months later might have occurred the following March and Jesus' birth nine months afterward.

"Though it is not a matter of faith, there is no good reason not to accept the tradition" of March 25 conception and Dec. 25 birth, the magazine contended.

Holidays a time of bigger crowds, opportunities for churches

BY JAY LINDSAY
The Associated Press

BOSTON — To describe his feelings at the pulpit during a jam-packed Christmas worship service, the Rev. Paul McPheeters talks "Monday Night Football."

The excitement of speaking in front of a big holiday crowd is like a player's during the prime-time game, he says. So many worshippers attend only on the holidays, and every preacher wants the service to be memorable and moving.

The result, says McPheeters, of Forestdale Community Church, is that when he stands in the pulpit he's just "a little more jacked up about it" than on a typical Sunday.

So are many of his colleagues. Around the country, ministers in churches big and small are preparing to welcome the annual rush of visitors who attend just on Christmas or Easter. These "Holiday Christians," as some call them, come for many reasons — whether they're dragged by family members or attracted to a hopeful message during what can be a time of loneliness.

Pastors and priests say they strive to be friendly, inspirational and clear about the Christmas message of God coming to earth to redeem humanity.

But whether it's music, drama or homilies, church leaders know that whatever they do must be done exceptionally well, said the Rev. Daniel Benedict, director of

worship resources at The United Methodist Church General Board of Discipleship.

"Culturally, the expectations are extremely high for Christmas," he said. "Worship services that don't meet the high expectations are doomed to failure for everyone, but particularly for the guests that are there infrequently."

Despite its commercialization, Christmas remains a time of personal and spiritual reflection, and that makes people open to the Christian message, said Gerald Mann of the Riverbend Church in Austin, Texas.

"This is the time of year to shine the light on all the dark places in your head," Mann said. "I think it's God's declaration that no matter how secular society gets, you can't kill God."

Pastors say they don't want holiday visitors to feel guilty because of their infrequent attendance or embarrassed because they're unfamiliar with church rituals. Some churches don't take offerings, so visitors won't feel the church is judging their money.

"We don't want people singled out or feeling awkward," said the Rev. Gordon Hugenberger, pastor the historic Park Street Church in Boston. "We're thrilled they're here."

Churches offer a variety of ways to tell the Christmas story, from simple candle-light services to elaborate musical presentations. For instance, the "Christmas Bursts

Into Beauty" presentation at Washington Cathedral in Redmond, Wash., features a live manger scene, soloists and harpists.

Involving children is a way to grab the attention of visiting parents and grandparents who come to watch them. It also emphasizes how God came to earth as a child, said the Rev. Erwin Lutzer of The Moody Church in Chicago. He gathers his congregation's children around him to tell the Christmas story during his service.

And, yes, he and other pastors get nervous when they look out at the congregation.

"There's a certain mood," Lutzer said. "We all want to do well. We want to make Jesus look good, if I can put it that way."

The Rev. Joseph Kujala, associate pastor at St. Peter and Paul Parish in Milwaukee, said Christmas is one of those times "when you really wish you could preach well."

McPheeters said that, for the first five of his 20 years in ministry, his main thought before the Christmas service was "Lord, get me out of here." But as years have passed, he's learned to rely on God to work through him, he said. Benedict of the Methodist board said that kind of thinking can help.

"Perhaps that is what unbinds the tension in this," he said.

Pastors interviewed said they don't do much to follow up with Christmas visitors, apart from routine steps such as sending



The Rev. Paul McPheeters, pastor at the Forestdale Community Church in Malden, Mass., said Tuesday he expects crowded church services during the holiday season.

letters to those who sign a guest book. White, of Washington Cathedral, said he relies on the Christmas story to draw people back.

"The Christmas message itself is inspiring to people who come from an unchurched background," White said. "It's an inspiring experience for people ... that takes down a lot of barriers."

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SCOREBOARD

AFN TV & Radio

Sunday

AFN-Sports, 7 a.m.—Pro football: NFL's Greatest Moments, 1970 Oakland Raiders vs. New England Patriots, 1970 Oakland Raiders at L.A. Lakers (d).

AFN-Sports, 9 a.m.—Pro basketball: Miami at L.A. Lakers (d).

AFN-Sports, 1 p.m.—Pro football: Denver at Tennessee (d).

AFN-Sports, 7 p.m.—Pro football: San Diego at Indianapolis.

AFN-Sports, 7 p.m.—Pro football: Baltimore at Pittsburgh.

AFN-Sports, 10 p.m.—Pro football: Arizona at Tampa Bay.

AFN-Sports, 10 p.m.—Pro football: Carolina at Tampa Bay.

AFN-Sports, 10 p.m.—Pro football: Buffalo at San Francisco.

Monday

AFN-Atlantic, 1 a.m.—Pro football: Houston at Jacksonville.

AFN-Sports and Radio, 230 a.m.—Pro football: Baltimore at San Francisco (d).

AFN-Sports, 3 a.m.—Pro basketball: Bulls at Denver (d).

AFN-Sports, 10 p.m.—College basketball: 2004 College Slam-Dunk and 3-Point Contest.

AFN-Sports, 5 p.m.—College football: MPC Computers at Miami.

AFN-Sports and Radio, 1130 p.m.—College football: Motor City Bowl, Toledo vs. Connecticut.

All Times Central European Time. Indicate times for broadcasts. All times subject to change. Visit www.afn.net for more information.

Pro baseball

Remaining free agents

NEW YORK — The 101 free agents seeking free agents (expected arbitration and may negotiate with teams through Jan. 1).

ANAHIM (C) — Shane Bieber, 3b; Aaron Sele, 1b.

ASTORIA (A) — Marty Cordova, dh; Omar Alab, dh; Buddy Gornoff, Jr. David

BOSTON (B) — Terry Adams, dh; Pedro Astacio, ss; Eric Bickel, dh; Rick Burdette, 2b; Curtis Leske, 1b; Derek Lowe, 1b; Dave Lowery, 1b; Ramon Martinez, dh; A-Polky Perez, 2b; Scott Williamson, rf; Jose Valdes, 1b; Roberto Hernandez, 1b; Maglio Ordonez, 1b.

BREITBURG (1) — Rick White, dh; Detroit (B) — Alan Levine, dh.

BREITBURG (2) — Juan Carlos Delgado, 1b; Miguel Cairo, 2b; Tony Clark, 1b; Travis Lee, 1b; Esteban Loaiza, 1b; Jose Lopez, 1b; Enrique Wilson, 1b.

OAKLAND (D) — Jose Canseco, 1b; Jim Thome, 1b; Edgar Martinez, dh.

SEATTLE (1) — Edgar Martinez, dh; Tony Clark, 1b; Todd Ritchie, 1b; Roy

TEXAS (B) — Andy Fox, 3b; Brad Fullmer, dh; Jose Canseco, 1b; Jose Guillen, 1b; Tony Herndon, 1b; Jay Powell, 1b.

TORONTO (B) — Dave Berg, dh; Valerio De Los Santos, 1b; Carlos Delgado, 1b; Pat Hentgen, 1b; Dave Van Horn, 1b.

ATLANTA (A) — Carlos Barrios, 1b; Danny Baskin, 1b; Mike Eassey, 1b; Steve Sparks, 1b; Scott Service, 1b; Steve Sparks, 1b.

ATLANTA (2) — A-Jaret Wright, 1b.

ATLANTA (3) — Moises Alou, 1b; Mark Ball, 1b; Tom Gooden, 1b; Ben Greive, 1b; Mark Lueke, 1b; Ramon Martinez, 1b.

ATLANTA (4) — Darren Bader, 1b; Larry Rarkin, 1b; Todd Vann Poppel, 1b; Gabe

ATLANTA (5) — Jeremy Brumfield, 1b; Shyne, 1b; Mike Eassey, 1b; Steve Sparks, 1b.

ATLANTA (6) — Chad Fox, 1b; Josias Muniz, 1b; Mike Merced, 1b.

ATLANTA (7) — Carlos Barrios, 1b; Dan Mota, 1b; David Oliver, 1b.

ATLANTA (8) — Tony Batista, 1b.

ATLANTA (9) — Tony Batista, 1b.

ATLANTA (10) — Tony Batista, 1b.

ATLANTA (11) — Tony Batista, 1b.

ATLANTA (12) — Tony Batista, 1b.

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SAN DIEGO (40) — Signed Rudy Sanchez, rf, to a \$500,000, one-year contract; signed

SAN DIEGO (41) — Signed Rudy Sanchez, rf, to a \$500,000, one-year contract; signed

SAN DIEGO (42) — Signed Rudy Sanchez, rf, to a \$500,000, one-year contract; signed

East-West Shrine Classic

At San Francisco

Saturday, Jan. 22

Hub Bowl

Alma, Hawaii

Saturday, Jan. 23

Senior Bowl

At Mobile, Ala.

North vs. South

Friday

1. Illinois (11-0) did not play. Next vs. Longwood.

2. Kansas (11-0) did not play. Next vs. No. 9.

3. Oklahoma State (11-0) did not play. Next vs. No. 10.

4. Oklahoma State (11-0) did not play. Next vs. No. 11.

5. Oklahoma State (11-0) did not play. Next vs. No. 12.

6. Oklahoma State (11-0) did not play. Next vs. No. 13.

7. Oklahoma State (11-0) did not play. Next vs. No. 14.

8. Oklahoma State (11-0) did not play. Next vs. No. 15.

9. Oklahoma State (11-0) did not play. Next vs. No. 16.

10. Oklahoma State (11-0) did not play. Next vs. No. 17.

11. Oklahoma State (11-0) did not play. Next vs. No. 18.

12. Oklahoma State (11-0) did not play. Next vs. No. 19.

13. Oklahoma State (11-0) did not play. Next vs. No. 20.

14. Oklahoma State (11-0) did not play. Next vs. No. 21.

15. Oklahoma State (11-0) did not play. Next vs. No. 22.

16. Oklahoma State (11-0) did not play. Next vs. No. 23.

17. Oklahoma State (11-0) did not play. Next vs. No. 24.

18. Oklahoma State (11-0) did not play. Next vs. No. 25.

19. Oklahoma State (11-0) did not play. Next vs. No. 26.

20. Oklahoma State (11-0) did not play. Next vs. No. 27.

21. Oklahoma State (11-0) did not play. Next vs. No. 28.

22. Oklahoma State (11-0) did not play. Next vs. No. 29.

23. Oklahoma State (11-0) did not play. Next vs. No. 30.

24. Oklahoma State (11-0) did not play. Next vs. No. 31.

25. Oklahoma State (11-0) did not play. Next vs. No. 32.

26. Oklahoma State (11-0) did not play. Next vs. No. 33.

27. Oklahoma State (11-0) did not play. Next vs. No. 34.

28. Oklahoma State (11-0) did not play. Next vs. No. 35.

29. Oklahoma State (11-0) did not play. Next vs. No. 36.

30. Oklahoma State (11-0) did not play. Next vs. No. 37.

31. Oklahoma State (11-0) did not play. Next vs. No. 38.

32. Oklahoma State (11-0) did not play. Next vs. No. 39.

33. Oklahoma State (11-0) did not play. Next vs. No. 40.

34. Oklahoma State (11-0) did not play. Next vs. No. 41.

35. Oklahoma State (11-0) did not play. Next vs. No. 42.

36. Oklahoma State (11-0) did not play. Next vs. No. 43.

37. Oklahoma State (11-0) did not play. Next vs. No. 44.

38. Oklahoma State (11-0) did not play. Next vs. No. 45.

39. Oklahoma State (11-0) did not play. Next vs. No. 46.

40. Oklahoma State (11-0) did not play. Next vs. No. 47.

41. Oklahoma State (11-0) did not play. Next vs. No. 48.

42. Oklahoma State (11-0) did not play. Next vs. No. 49.

43. Oklahoma State (11-0) did not play. Next vs. No. 50.

44. Oklahoma State (11-0) did not play. Next vs. No. 51.

45. Oklahoma State (11-0) did not play. Next vs. No. 52.

46. Oklahoma State (11-0) did not play. Next vs. No. 53.

47. Oklahoma State (11-0) did not play. Next vs. No. 54.

48. Oklahoma State (11-0) did not play. Next vs. No. 55.

49. Oklahoma State (11-0) did not play. Next vs. No. 56.

50. Oklahoma State (11-0) did not play. Next vs. No. 57.

51. Oklahoma State (11-0) did not play. Next vs. No. 58.

52. Oklahoma State (11-0) did not play. Next vs. No. 59.

53. Oklahoma State (11-0) did not play. Next vs. No. 60.

54. Oklahoma State (11-0) did not play. Next vs. No. 61.

55. Oklahoma State (11-0) did not play. Next vs. No. 62.

56. Oklahoma State (11-0) did not play. Next vs. No. 63.

57. Oklahoma State (11-

Rapid rise for UConn since switch to I-A

Meeting with Toledo in Motor City latest stop on short road to success

BY JEMELLE HILL
Detroit Free Press

DETROIT — As their plane descended to Detroit Metro Airport, they could see it lit up and blinking at them from underneath the clouds: U-C-O-N-N.

The Connecticut football players were already excited, but this sent them to another level. The name was emblazoned on the team's hotel, the Dearborn Hyatt Regency.

"It was sweet," senior quarterback Dan Orlovsky said. "I wonder what they do if you're at the Sugar Bowl?"

Other Motor City Bowl teams might embrace playing in Detroit this December like they would the Ebola virus.

Even if the bowl were in Iceland or a foot of snow fell today, nothing could spoil the first bowl trip in Connecticut's history. The Huskies play Toledo on Monday at Ford Field.

Four years ago, the Huskies were 2-9 and in the midst of a difficult transition from Division I-A football from I-AA. Thoughts of a bowl game were far away.

"A lot of teams have played in bowl games and they take it for granted," Coach said. "That's something Coach is trying to stress. Don't take anything for granted. It's a privilege to be here."

But we're ecstatic to be here. It's our first bowl game and our first time playing in a postseason game. We didn't care where we went. We just wanted to go somewhere and we were lucky enough to come to Detroit."

When Orlovsky committed to UConn over Virginia and Purdue, everybody thought he was crazy — even his own father.

But Orlovsky saw big-time football on the rise at UConn, a university known almost exclusively for its college basketball teams.

Now committing to the Huskies isn't so strange anymore.

The Huskies opened the 40,000-seat, \$91 million Rentschler Field this season. It's about a half-hour from UConn's Storrs campus, but it's a serious upgrade from Memorial Stadium, which sat only 16,200.

"It was high school," Orlovsky said. "That's no knock on the stadium. It was a great stadium, but it wasn't a I-A stadium."

In 2006, UConn will unveil the Burton Family Football Complex and the Max R. Shenkman Training Center — connected \$42 million state-of-the-art facilities that include a 120-yard playing surface and an 18,000-square-foot strength and conditioning area. It also was made possible because of \$2.5 million donations from prominent alumni Mark R. Shenkman and Robert Burton, whose son Michael captained the 1999 UConn football team.

Things have moved just as fast for the Huskies on the field, too.

The Huskies lost 12 of their first 17 games after moving up to I-A.

They have gone 22-16 since, including a 7-4 record this season. They finished 3-3 in the Big East. There were several program-building victories along the way, including a 29-17 defeat



Connecticut quarterback Dan Orlovsky is among the 11 senior starters who have led the team to its first bowl bid.

Big East champion Pittsburgh. The Panthers are playing in the Fiesta Bowl, a Bowl Championship Series game, leading the Huskies to believe even bigger things loom in their future.

"It's one of those things where I don't say it's a surprise, they'll say you don't see your expectations high enough," coach Randy Edsall said. "I think it's a surprise to everybody. We're in a bowl game in three years. There are some teams that haven't gone to a bowl game in decades. It could probably be a surprise, but when you look at the makeup of this team, the coaching staff and what we've tried to do, then I don't think it's surprising."

Until now, the football team has felt like the odd man out within

UConn's big-time sports community. The Panthers are playing in the Fiesta Bowl, a Bowl Championship Series game, leading the Huskies to believe even bigger things loom in their future.

Through this berth in the Motor City Bowl doesn't match that success, the football team no longer feels like the nobody on campus. And Edsall believes it's only a matter of time before the team becomes contributing to UConn's championship tradition.

Never mind that the AP poll has been a monumental ride and a monumental experience to get here this quickly," Edsall said. "A lot of us in our wildest dreams never thought this could happen."

Big Ten asks NCAA to OK instant replay for I-A football

By NANCY ARMOUR
The Associated Press

CHICAGO — The Big Ten's experiment with instant replay went so well the conference is asking the NCAA to approve its use on a permanent basis for all of Division I-A.

The Big Ten hopes its proposal will be heard by the NCAA Football Rules Committee at its February meeting. If instant replay can't be approved for widespread use in time for next season, the Big Ten is also asking the NCAA for a one-year extension for its system, and to allow other conferences to experiment with it in 2005.

"It's our understanding that the request for more permanent change may require a more lengthy process of review in the NCAA governance system," Big Ten Commissioner Jim Delany said Thursday.

The NCAA gave the Big Ten permission to experiment with instant replay for all of its televised games at conference stadiums last season. Under the Big Ten's system, a technical adviser watched the game from the press box and notified officials on the field via pager if he saw something questionable. Play was halted while the adviser reviewed the call using video from the television feed.

Calls could be overturned only if there was "indisputable video evidence," and only calls like scoring plays, pass interference or players on the field could be reviewed. Hard fouls such as blocks in the back and facemasks, and some other judgment calls like false starts were not eligible for review.

The Big Ten said replay was used in 28 of the 57 games last season. Of the 43 calls questioned, 21 were overturned.

College football's B-movie horror classic: The BCS Lives!

Were at that point in college football's annual B-movie horror classic when the monster staggers back to its feet for the umpteenth time.

But the BCS already been stabbed and electrocuted, folded, mutilated and spindled, drowned, fricasseed and, most recently, flattened by a steamroller. But in the next moment, with the monster rising to its full height yet again, comes the awful realization: The BCS lives! Dr. Frankenstein had nothing on the suits who brought the Bowl Championship Series to life. Like his creation, theirs also was a bad idea that's only gotten worse over time. It has turned college presidents into hypocrites, good coaches to become beggars and turned off more fans than anything since Roseanne Barr put on a football uniform for the movie "Backfield in Motion."

But the BCS isn't going anywhere. Bloodied but unbowed by the news this week that The Associated Press would not allow its

Jim Litke



poll to be used in determining its rankings, Big East commissioner and former BCS boss Mike Transhese promised yet another reincarnation after the organization meets in April.

"The BCS is here and it's going to continue. But the BCS is a target for all the playoff proponents. When something like this happens, they jump on it. They look at something like this as a crack. They don't understand the strong perception of our presidents," he said.

Transhese is right about that last point. A playoff system could incorporate the major bowls and bring in more money for everyone involved and is favored by a majority of the coaches, players and fans.

The real reason the college presidents won't go along is simple: They want to protect the six major conferences, four bowls and the TV network that control the BCS and decide how to divvy up the take. But the reason they offer is that a playoff would harm their student-athletes' chances at academic success. Please. Even an old-school authority like Penn State coach Joe Paterno isn't buying that line anymore.

"I think the college presidents allowing the BCS thing is a real, real shame," he said recently. "Whenever the talk turns to having some kind of a playoff, they say you can't miss classes and yet we've already got NCAA playoffs (in every other college sport) and everything else."

"I mean, who's kidding who?" Paterno added. "They've got to try to figure out a way to get rid of it and the hypocrisy of money, money, money."

It's small consolation, but the BCS is already hard at work — not at legislating itself out of exist-

ence, or ending the hypocrisy, mind you, but on the "money, money, money" part. The organization just signed a four-year deal worth \$320 million with Fox for the broadcast rights to the Fiesta, Orange and Sugar bowls from 2007-10 and the national title game from 2007-09. And credibility has never been high on the BCS' to-do list.

Never mind that the AP poll comprised one-third of the formula the BCS used to draw up this season's rankings — the coaches' poll and six computers made up the remaining two-thirds — or that the writers and broadcasters were the only ones who made their votes public. The coaches, many of whom have contracts triggering handsome bonuses for appearances in BCS bowls, have already indicated a willingness to stay on, and keeping the computers in the fold won't require anything more than a steady supply of electricity.

"We're just going to have to put our heads together," Transhese

said, "and come up with an alternative way of picking the teams for the 12 games."

Small wonder Transhese was undaunted. Since they hijacked the postseason in 1998, the BCS and its old-boy network have had to revise the formula four times and the frothy running scheme for alternative No. 5 is creation of a selection committee, similar to the one used for the NCAA's basketball tournament. The major difference, of course, is that after the basketball committee finishes seeding the teams, the championship is decided on the court.

The BCS won't go that far in reforming the system. And short of a playoff, it will never resolve the underlying flaw inherent in trying to seed a two-team tournament any time there are three or more deserving contenders. But at least the monster will look different.

Jim Litke is a national sports columnist for The Associated Press. Write to him at: jlitke@ap.org

Chang passes 17,000 mark in Hawaii win

BY JAYMES SONG
The Associated Press

HONOLULU — When Timmy Chang jogged off the field for the final time at Aloha Stadium, he left Hawaii with more than just a big lead in the Hawaii Bowl.

He also left behind a record-setting legacy.

Chang became the first college quarterback to pass for 17,000 yards, throwing four touchdown passes and running for another score to lead Hawaii to a 59-40 victory over Alabama-Birmingham on Friday night.

"If you wouldn't tell me it would've turned out like this, I would've probably called you a liar," he said.

The fifth-year senior from Honolulu went 31-for-46 for 405 yards with no interceptions, spoiling the Blazers' first trip to a bowl. Co-MVP Chad Owens caught eight passes for 114 yards and two TDs for Hawaii (8-5), which made its third straight appearance in the 3-year-old bowl.

"Their offense and those two guys drove us crazy," Blazers coach Watson Brown said.

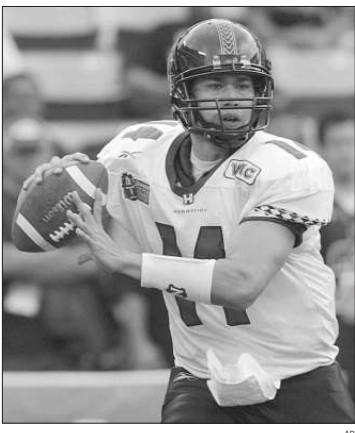
Owens also scored on a 59-yard punt return in the decisive third quarter, and teammate Jason Rivers added 11 receptions for 148 yards and a TD.

"I don't think it's really hitting me yet that it's over," Owens said. "But when it does, it's going to hurt."

Clinging to a 2-point lead, Hawaii scored 17 straight points in the third to take a 45-26 lead over UAB (7-5).

On Owens' spectacular return, he caught the ball at the Hawaii 41, broke a tackle near midfield and streaked down the left side of the field to the end zone for a touchdown. It was his fifth punt return for a score this season and his third TD of the game.

The senior also made an over-the-shoulder catch of a 15-yard pass from Chang, push-



Hawaii quarterback Timmy Chang (14) looks to pass against Alabama-Birmingham during the first quarter of the Hawaii Bowl on Friday.

ing Hawaii's lead to 35-26. With that pass, Chang became the first college quarterback to break the 17,000-yard mark for his career. He finished more than 2,000 yards ahead of Ty Detmer, who ranks second on the NCAA list.

Chang's 4-yard TD run in the fourth sealed the victory. He left to a standing ovation with 5:40 remaining and hugged coach June Jones.

"When Coach Jones told me to go in and take one last snap, it really made me sad," Chang said. "I just really had an awesome time here. I'm going to miss it a lot."

Chang owns NCAA marks for

yards passing (17,072), attempts (2,436), completions (1,388), interceptions (80) and total offense (16,910). With 117 TD passes, he overtook Danny Wuerffel (114) and Tim Rattay (115), and is second to Detmer (121).

"I don't believe what he has accomplished will ever, ever be broken again," Jones said.

Chang threw for 4,258 yards this season, with a career-best 38 TDs. He joins Detmer as the only NCAA passers with three 4,000-yard seasons.

Chang was 19-for-27 for 308 yards and three TDs in the first half against UAB.

Last year, Chang was booed at home and benched late in the season. Yet he came off the bench and threw for 475 yards and five touchdowns in a 54-48 triple-overtime victory over Houston in the Hawaii Bowl.

Chang said he has learned a lot from the adversity he faced throughout his career.

"I've learned lifelong lessons that 'I'll carry off the field,'" he said.

It was the Warriors' eighth straight victory at Aloha Stadium, though they were designated the visiting team for this game.

UAB was led by quarterback Darrell Hackney, who finished 31-for-54 for 417 yards and two touchdowns. He also had a rushing TD and earned MVP honors for the Blazers.

Roddy White, the No. 2 receiver in the nation, had two receptions for 113 yards.

The Blazers failed to establish their ground game against the nation's worst rush defense. And by the third quarter, they were forced to air it out. Dan Burks led UAB with 55 rushing yards on 14 carries.

"We had to go from a two-dimensional team to a passing team," Brown said.

A 10-yard TD run by Norris Drinkard and a 36-yard field goal by Nick Hayes cut Hawaii's lead to 28-26 at halftime, but the Blazers couldn't get any closer.

A 17-yard pass from Hackney to Lance Rhodes drew UAB within 12 points with 2:06 left, but Britton Komine returned UAB's onside kick 42 yards for a touchdown to end any hopes of a rally.

The game featured 1,079 yards of offense, including 699 in the first half.

Both high-powered offenses got off to quick starts on a 75-degree Christmas Eve, scoring five touchdowns in the first 10 minutes.

The teams traded runs for a 4-yard touchdown run by West

Kelikipi and a 29-yard scoring pass from Chang to Gerald Welch put Hawaii up 21-13.

Hackney threw a dart to his favorite target, White, on a slant play that went 67 yards for a touchdown on UAB's opening series.

On the next play, Hawaii took a 7-6 lead on a 74-yard pass from Chang to Rivers, who waltzed along the sideline before breaking across the field.

But not all was lost for the Blazers, who moved up to Division I-A in 1996 after completing in Divisions III and I-AA. They got to spend a week in Waikiki.

"This week was the highlight of my career," UAB linebacker Zac Woodfin said.

Friday Hawaii 59, UAB 40

Hawaii 21 7 17 14-59

UAB 13 13 13 7-40

First Quarter

UAB—R-White 51 pass from Hackney (kick failed), 11:06.

Haw—Rivers 74 pass from Chang (Ayat kick), 10:45.

UAB—Burks 4 run (Hayes kick), 8:19.

Haw—Kelikipi 4 (Ayat kick), 5:32.

Haw—White 42 pass from Chang (Ayat kick), 3:57.

Second Quarter

Haw—F-Hayes 22, 13:43.

Haw—Owens 13 pass from Chang (Ayat kick), 9:14.

UAB—Drinkard 10 run (Hayes kick), 6:03.

Haw—F-Hayes 36, 3:03.

Third Quarter

Haw—Owens 15 pass from Chang (Ayat kick), 11:44.

Haw—Owens 59 punt return (Ayat kick), 7:44.

Haw—F-Ayat 43, 3:41.

UAB—Hackney 4 run (Hayes kick), 2:11.

Haw—Chang 4 run (Ayat kick), 0:40.

Haw—Kelikipi 27 pass from Hackney (Hayes kick), 2:06.

Haw—White 42 kickoff return (Ayat kick), 1:55.

A-36,322.

Final Score

Haw 21 7 17 14-59

UAB 13 13 13 7-40

Individual Statistics

Passing—Hawaii: Breckler 7-8, Kelikipi 6-27, Chang 31-54, UAB: Burks 14-55, C-White 9-53, Drinkard 9-56, Elliott 4-26, Hackney 5-3.

Passing—Hawaii: Breckler 7-8, Kelikipi 6-27, Chang 31-54, UAB: Burks 14-55, C-White 9-53, Drinkard 9-56, Elliott 4-26, Hackney 5-3.

Receiving—Hawaii: Rivers 11-148, Owens 8-144, Welch 6-86, Komine 3-54, Kelikipi 2-14, UAB: White 6-111, Chavez 5-88, Drinkard 4-58, Rhodes 4-54, Duncan 3-28, Burks 3-20, Lindsey 3-19, C-White 2-34.

Wyoming edges UCLA for first bowl victory since 1966

The Associated Press

LAS VEGAS — When Corey Bramlet and John Wadkowski broke the huddle, they knew the Las Vegas Bowl was there for the taking.

And take it they did, with Bramlet drilling the ball to the wide-open Wadkowski with 57 seconds left to give Wyoming a 24-21 defeat of UCLA on Thursday night, the Cowboys' first bowl victory since 1966.

"I knew what the coverage was and what they were giving us, and I knew it was there," Bramlet said.

Wadkowski knew it, too.

"When we broke the huddle, Corey said to me, 'Make a play,'" Wadkowski said. The Wyoming players mobbed each

Bowl rundown

other on the field, swapping hugs and high-fives, after the final seconds ticked off. "I couldn't be happier for our whole team, and I think it is a shot of spirit for our whole state," second-year Wyoming coach Joe Glenn said.

After beating Florida State in the 1966 Sun Bowl, the Cowboys lost their six bowl games and hadn't even been invited to one since 1993.

Glenn said a letter from Tom Frazier, a friend of his, helped inspire the Cowboys.

"Since 1966, we hadn't won a bowl game, and the captain of that team [Frazier] wrote our team a great letter," Glenn said.

"He said that there's nothing like standing on the field looking at the scoreboard, walking away as a senior and winning a bowl game in your last year."

"Now our guys can do that."

Bramlet, 20-for-34 for 307 yards and two touchdowns, drove the Cowboys 72 yards to the winning score. The drive began with 4:02 remaining, after UCLA's Justin Medlock missed a 45-yard field goal on what turned out to be a critical play.

Bramlet kept the final march going with a quarterback sneak on a fourth-and-1, getting the first down by just a few inches at the UCLA 27. A pass-interference call against cornerback Matt Clark moved the ball to the 12, and Bramlet put the ball right on target to Wadkowski.

Jovon Bouknight had five catches for 107 yards and threw a touchdown pass for Wyoming (7-5).

Cincinnati 32, Marshall 14: At Fort Worth, Texas, Gino Guidigli returned from a broken throwing hand to pass for 231 yards and two touchdowns for Cincinnati (7-5) in the Fort Worth Bowl.

Wearing a padded glove on his still very swollen right hand, which he injured on Nov. 20, Guidigli completed 24 of 36 passes on a bitterly cold night.

After his only interception, which Marshall (6-6) returned for a score, Guidigli completed 10 straight passes and 14 of 16 passes in the second quarter. He threw both TD passes that stretch to put Cincinnati ahead to stay.

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The chase is on

Gonzaga is still the team being pursued in the WCC, but this season others insist the Zags can be caught

BY JANIE MCCAULEY
The Associated Press

“Everybody knows Gonzaga’s beatable now. Everyone in the conference looks like they have a chance to win it.”

Doron Perkins
Santa Clara guard

The West Coast Conference for the past few years has been Gonzaga and everybody else.

But as the other schools already have shown this season, there’s a whole lot more to the WCC than the No. 13 Bulldogs.

Santa Clara shocked North Carolina and upended neighbor Stanford in an opening month that brought the Broncos their most national attention since Steve Nash was running the point.

Saint Mary’s earned a trip to Madison Square Garden and plenty of exposure in the Coaches vs. Cancer Classic, San Francisco put together its longest winning streak in five years under new coach Jessie Evans.

“I don’t know if you can call it a mid-major conference anymore,” said California coach Ben Braun, whose Bears lost to Saint Mary’s earlier this season. “They can play with anyone in the country.”

Longtime Santa Clara coach Dick Davey has been around the WCC long enough to recognize a special season before it begins. He is convinced this could be one of those years, especially for the San Francisco Bay area teams determined to finally make things tough for the favored Bulldogs.

Gonzaga coach Mark Few knows it won’t be easy.

“I’ve always said this conference is competitive. It has better players than people realize and has always had good, quality coaches,” Few said. “It’s a conference that has always been underrated. It’s said it takes a couple of big non-conference wins for people to see how competitive this conference is and to appreciate it more.”

Gonzaga’s greatness in the WCC resembles the dominance of those talented 1970s San Francisco teams featuring Bill Cart-

wright, James Hardy and Winford Boynes — and the Bulldogs are showing no signs of a let-down.

While Gonzaga is still the team to beat, the standings could be more crowded near the top than in years past.

“Gonzaga was really good last year,” Saint Mary’s coach Randy Bennett said. “People keep thinking they’re going to drop off, but they’re not going to drop off. We, Santa Clara and Pepperdine have figured out they’re not dropping off, so you better improve your program.”

“That’s what’s happening. There are a lot of teams that want a piece of that.”

The Zags, who jumped nine spots in the latest AP poll after their victory over Georgia Tech last Saturday, have won five of the last six WCC tournaments and a share of the regular-season title in six of the past seven years. They didn’t lose a league game last year.

Gonzaga will get an immediate test this time around, opening the conference campaign at Santa Clara on Jan. 6 and then playing at Saint Mary’s two days later. Pepperdine is another contender.

“Everybody knows Gonzaga’s beatable now,” Santa Clara guard Doron Perkins said. “Everyone in

the conference looks like they have a chance to win it.”

Saint Mary’s and Santa Clara made splashes early, but both also lost key games that could hurt their NCAA tournament chances come March. The Gaels lost to Memphis in the Coaches vs. Cancer Classic, then lost on the road to Rutgers and Hawaii.

After defeating North Carolina and Stanford, the Broncos lost to Pacific, Cal Poly and UC Irvine. And they were defeated 68-63 at Arizona State on Wednesday.

The WCC is eighth in the latest RPI ratings, highest ever for the conference. The WCC is on pace to top its previous best non-conference showing, a .649 winning percentage in 1978-79.

“It might be the best year. Time will tell because time tests where you are,” said Davey, who’s in his 13th season as coach of the Broncos. “But at this point in the season, this is as strong as I’ve seen our conference in a long, long, long time. My thinking is more along the lines that maybe we have enough teams that are good enough this year that we might be able to get two or three teams in the tournament rather than one, which is customary.”

The WCC has had two teams reach the NCAA tournament only five times in the last 15 years and has never sent three teams.

In the 1950s, San Francisco won consecutive NCAA titles thanks to stars such as Bill Russell and K.C. Jones. The Loyola Marymount teams of the ‘90s with Hank Gathers and Bo Kimble provided another glimpse of the conference’s potential.

“People don’t realize how tough it is to win on the road in this conference,” Few said. “For us to go 14-0 like we did last year was remarkable. For anybody to go undefeated in this conference is quite an accomplishment, and I don’t say that because we were the ones to do it last year.”



Gonzaga's Pierre Marie Altidor-Céspedes chases down a loose ball during a recent victory over Eastern Washington. Although Gonzaga is still the team to beat in the West Coast Conference, other schools believe this is the season the Zags might finally be caught.

Matt Heldman's legacy, a driving force for Illini

BY MARLEN GARCIA
Chicago Tribune

CHAMPAIGN, Ill. — The players see Matt Heldman every day in the framed, glossy photograph that hangs in their locker room.

They see an undersized, skinny kid who invested every moment to its fullest on the basketball court and had a gigantic presence for a 6-foot, 165-pound player.

Matt Heldman's spirit remains a fixture at Illinois nearly seven years after he helped lead the Illini to a Big Ten title and five years since he and his father, Otis, died in a car accident. Matt was 23.

The hardest-working members of Illinois' top-ranked team honor Heldman's memory every day they drive onto the floor to recover loose balls or make gutsy defensive plays. Coaches sometimes refer to

Commentary

these plays as “intangibles” hard-nosed, aggressive moves coaches praise from the pee-wee levels all the way up to the NBA.

“It’s the little things,” coach Bruce Weber said. “Being on your toes, getting deflections, being in position to get a charge.”

Illinois coaches recognize and reward such gritty, determined effort by awarding points to players on the “Matto chart,” a statistics record team managers update during every Illinois game.

The player who makes the most plays has his name posted in the locker room at the Assembly Hall, again in Heldman's name. The player who accumulates the most plays during the course of

the season has his name inscribed on a plaque hanging in the locker room that commemorates Heldman's contributions.

“That’s a great award to win,” third-year guard Dee Brown said. “It means you’re playing hard no matter what’s going on in the game.”

Since his arrival at Illinois, Brown proudly has monopolized the award, winning it at the conclusion of his freshman and sophomore seasons. And he’s on his way to a third straight.

Earlier this year, the student fan group at Illinois, the Orange Krush, asked Heldman's mother and sister to attend the dedication of a scholarship in his name. The students raised \$250,000 for the endowment.

Lucas Johnson, whose older brother Brian played and roomed

really didn’t watch Illinois basketball growing up. But I knew who Matt Heldman was. It was an honor to have that award.”

Heldman left an impression wherever he played. He starred for Libertyville High School through his senior year in 1994. Former Illinois coach Lou Henson recruited and signed him.

Those who enter Libertyville's gymnasium learn a little about Heldman when they look up at the scoreboard dedicated to him in December 2000.

Earlier this year, the student fan group at Illinois, the Orange Krush, asked Heldman's mother and sister to attend the dedication of a scholarship in his name. The students raised \$250,000 for the endowment.

Lucas Johnson, whose older brother Brian played and roomed

with Heldman, won the award in 2002, the first year Illinois officially recognized it.

“It was really emotional for me,” Johnson said, “and that had to do completely with Matt and everything he gave to Illinois.”

Former Illini assistant Rob Judson, now the coach at Northern Illinois, gave Heldman the nickname Matto and later helped create the award.

“I weighed 175 pounds on his good days,” Judson said. “But he would face any obstacle or disadvantage by playing his heart out every game. You could never say no to Matt because he was going to find a way to get the job done regardless of the odds.”

“It’s inspirational. His legacy is there. The film clips are still there.”

Above all, his heart and soul are still there.

Few complaints from coach as Huskies roll on

The Associated Press

SEATTLE — The Washington Huskies think they're playing their best basketball of the season and they look ready to make a run at the Pac-10 championship.

"We committed 24 turnovers, but after that there's nothing that I can complain about," coach Lorenzo Romar said after the Huskies beat Houston 110-63 on Friday. "I can't think of too many more performances that we've had than that we've done a better job through the entire game on both ends of the floor."

Bobby Jones scored 22 points to lead five Washington players in double figures. Jamaal Williams added 19 points. Tre Simmons and Brandon Roy each scored 16, and Nate Robinson had 11 for the No. 12 Huskies (10-1), who averaged a 15-point loss at Houston last season.

Jones, a starting forward, shot 8-for-9 and led the Huskies with nine rebounds in 25 minutes. Roy, a junior swingman who is considered Washington's top all-around player, played in his second game since undergoing knee surgery.

Using an aggressive man-to-man defense, Washington forced 23 turnovers. The Cougars shot only 20-for-64 and missed 19 of 23 three-point attempts.

"We played like old veterans today," Romar said. "You look at the teams that Houston has played and what they've accomplished. They're not a Top 20

team at this point, but they're no walk in the park."

Washington scored 100 points for the third time in four games and won its sixth in a row since losing to No. 13 Gonzaga by 12 points on Dec. 1.

"That was probably our best start defensively," Jones said. "Our confidence is extra high. We had one little slip against Gonzaga, but overall we had a great pre-season."

Houston (8-4) was led by Chris Lawson with 18 points and Andre Owens with 17. The frustrated Cougars were whistled for three technical fouls.

After the game, first-year-Houston coach Tom Penders criticized the Pac-10 officiating crew. He said the officials allowed the Huskies to hand check with two hands, use their arms on defense and "knock our guys to the floor."

"It's hard to beat five guys, let alone eight," Penders said. "I would love to play them on a neutral floor or in Houston with Conference USA officials or neutral officials. I think we'd beat them."

Thursday

No. 10 Pittsburgh 69, Richmond 60: At Pittsburgh, Carl Krauser scored 31 points, the most by a Pitt player since the school opened its new arena two years ago.

Krauser was 6-for-8 from three-pointers as Pitt (9-0) went 9-for-18 from beyond the arc despite playing without guard Antonio Graves, who sat out with a sprained ankle.

The Panthers were the nation's seventh-worst outside shooting team last season, but are making 42 percent of their three-pointers this season.

Krauser matched the arena record of 31 set by Notre Dame's Matt Carroll in January 2003, and is the first Pitt player to score more than 30 points since Ricardo Greer had 33 on Feb. 16, 2000, against Syracuse.

Krauser scored 12 points during a 17-6 run that boosted Pitt's lead to 56-44 with 9:24 to go — including six as Pitt scored eight



Washington's Joel Smith, left, draws a charging foul against Houston's Chris Lawson in the first half of Friday night's game.

straight points in only 33 seconds. Krauser hit three-pointers on consecutive possessions and was fouled on the second. He missed the free throw, but Chevron Troutman scored off the rebound to put Pitt up 47-38.

Richmond (4-4) closed to 62-58 with just over 3 minutes remaining. But Krauser made four free throws and Ronald Ramon added two down the stretch to hold off the Spiders.

No. 20 George Washington 81, Florida International 71: At Miami, T.J. Thompson hit five of his six three-pointers in the second half and scored 25 points to lead the Colonials (8-1) to their eighth straight win.

Florida's Knights had 22 points and 13 rebounds for the Golden Panthers (5-5), who hosted a ranked team for the first time since 1997 and dropped to 0-13 against Top 25 teams.

No. 24 Maryland 82, American 61: At College Park, Md., John Gilchrist scored 20 points and keyed a 16-0 run that gave the Terrapins (7-2) a 66-48 lead with 6:19 to play.

Jason Thomas had 14 points for the Eagles (5-3), who had a five-game winning streak snapped. Maryland has won 12 straight over American since 1926, when the Eagles won the first game of the series.

No. 25 Virginia 79, Loyola Marymount 77 (OT): At Charlottesville, Va., Elton Brown scored 25 points, and J.R. Reynolds made a driving layup with 1:50 seconds remaining in overtime for the Cavaliers (8-1).

Matthew Knight had 27 points for the Lions (7-3).

Basketball with an old-time feel comes to ESPN

BY JIM O'CONNELL

The Associated Press

If you miss the days when players' shorts really were short and television screens weren't filled with scoreboards and running scores, ESPN Classic is turning back the clock for you.

On Jan. 5, the network will broadcast the first of nine live college basketball games, each featuring "throwback" graphics and production values to make the telecasts appear as they would have years ago.

Jim Simpson, an original ESPN personality, will do the play-by-play with various guest commentators including retired coaches.

The first game — West Virginia at Villanova — will have a late '70s feel to turn the clock back to when ESPN was launched. Other eras may be featured in the other telecasts and there could be games with teams in retro uniforms and fans in period-specific dresses.

The last of the nine telecasts will be Rutgers at Notre Dame on March 2.

Bye-bye, bounce: Stanford players already miss their infamous bouncy floor at Maples Pavilion.

The arena underwent a \$30 million facelift during the past 10 months, and one of many changes included the installation of a new court without the bounce.

Stanford played its first game in the new Maples last weekend, a 72-62 victory over UC Davis.

"Obviously, they did a great job with the place," forward Dan Grunfeld said. "It's a great place. Whatever floor it is, you've got to play. I like our floor, it was our little thing. But we could play on a carpet and we'd still be playing."

During construction, Stanford practiced in a gym across campus and had trailers that served as a temporary locker room. The Cardinal were scheduled to play their early season home games at nearby Santa Clara University and weren't expected to be back in Maples until January, but the renovation finished ahead of schedule.

The new additions to Maples also include a main scoreboard with video capabilities, new seating in the lower bowl area, an outdoor concourse, upgraded classrooms and meeting rooms, and more restrooms and concession stands.

The Cardinal went unbeaten at home last season, when they finished with a 30-2 record and ranked No. 1.

Pure Pitino: The ending of last weekend's Kentucky-Louisville game provided plenty of postgame fodder. Did Patrick Spurge travel before taking the last-second

College notes

and three-point attempt on which he was fouled? Did Sparks jump into defender Ellis Myles and cause the contact, an offensive foul? Sparks hit the three free throws with 6 seconds left and Kentucky won 60-58.

Louisville coach Rick Pitino wouldn't buy into any of the second- and third-day conjecture.

"Losers take the film and say, 'He traveled twice. There were charges,'" Pitino said. "But Kentucky was a gutsy group. They came back from a devastating half against one of the best crowds you'll ever see in college basketball. Whether he (Sparks) traveled or not, is irrelevant, because he's a gutsy, gutsy kid."

"You can never, ever look to officials to win a game for you," Pitino said. "We had the option to stop the out of bounds play. We did not. We had the option to make big plays. We did not. They did."

"They deserve all the credit."

Rookie record: It's taken Antonio Agudiu just over a month to make quite an impression on the Colonial Athletic Association.

The redshirt freshman guard from Hofstra has been chosen the league's rookie of the week four times, breaking the conference record for a season by one.

In Hofstra's 8-0 start — the best ever for the school on the Division I level — Agudiu is second in scoring on the Pride with a 15.3 average and is shooting 41.6 percent (20-for-48) from beyond the arc.

Impressive start: Texas A&M went 7-21 last season and Billy Gillespie was hired to replace Melvin Watkins as coach of the Aggies.

Gillespie is off to the second-best start ever for a Texas A&M coach.

A 97-76 victory over Grambling State on Wednesday night gave the Aggies a 9-0 record. That is the best start for Texas A&M since the 1959-60 team went 10-0 and rose to No. 8 in the poll.

The coach Gillespie is chasing? Tubby Graves won his first 11 games in 1915-16.

Bad trips: Tulsa's 97-74 victory over Prairie View this season was the third-largest margin of victory for the Golden Hurricane in their Reynolds Center.

The second-largest margin was a 69-point victory over Prairie View in 2000. The biggest was a 91-point victory over Prairie View in 1995.

That's three losses for Prairie View in the same building by a combined 213 points.

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Suns win again despite Jazz defense

The Associated Press

PHOENIX — No team since Michael Jordan and the Chicago Bulls were at their best has gotten off to a better start to a season than the Phoenix Suns.

Amare Stoudemire had 30 points, 11 rebounds and five steals — and Shawn Marion on scored 29 points — to lead the Suns in their season-best 10th consecutive victory, 109-102 over the Memphis Grizzlies on Thursday night.

NBA roundup

The Suns — winners of nine in a row earlier this season — improved to 23-3, the NBA's best start the Bulls went 41-3 in 1995-96.

Steve Nash had 17 points and 14 assists, and sealed the victory with four free throws in the last 21 seconds. Nash has had at least 10 assists in each of the 10 victories. Only Magic Johnson — in 1986-87 — has managed that feat in NBA history. But the Suns were not all that happy with their latest performance, especially on defense.

"We're getting a bad habit of playing defense when we want to," coach Mike D'Antoni said. "We need to address that." D'Antoni thinks the Suns are getting a bit too comfortable because of their impressive record.

"You can see we can get a lot better," he said, "but I like our record so I can't complain too much."

Nash agrees with his coach's concerns. "I think our team should be proud, but I

think they also should see signs of complacency in these. We need to get more focused," he said.

Mike Miller scored 19 of his 22 points in the first half for Memphis, and Jason Williams had 19 of his 21 in the second. Pau Gasol added 19 points for the Grizzlies.

"We had it where we wanted to get it," Miller said. "I missed the big shot and they made the free throws. That's basically it."

Down 77-70 with 2:25 left in the third quarter, the Suns called a timeout, then went on a 17-0 run to go up 87-77 on Stoudemire's 17-footer from the baseline with 9:51 left in the game.

Memphis cut it to 103-99 on Williams' three-pointer, followed Gasol's inside hook with 1:53 to go. After Shane Battier missed a three, Stoudemire sank two free throws and Phoenix led 105-99.

Miller's three-pointer, his only basket of the second half, with 45.1 seconds left made it 105-102. Marion's air-ball from three-point range gave the Grizzlies the ball and a chance to tie.

But Miller, who made his first nine shots, threw up an air-ball with two seconds to go, and Nash clinched it at the line.

Coach Mike Fratello felt a lot better than he did after the Grizzlies' loss at Golden State on Wednesday.

"Overall, for there's a lot of good I saw coming out of this game," he said. "It's not a win, but we have to try to build on it."

Phoenix scored the last eight points of the third quarter and the first nine of the fourth. Marion had seven points and Stoudemire had six.

Consecutive stuffs by Stoudemire and

Marion, both on passes from Nash, made it 95-83 with 5:51 to play.

The Grizzlies, playing for the second night in a row, finished their western trip 2-2.

Spurs 96, Timberwolves 82: At San Antonio, Manu Ginobili scored 22 points, and San Antonio's Kevin Garnett to just one second-half basket.

The Spurs, who trailed by double digits in the first half, made 11 of their 18 shots in the fourth quarter to break open a tie game. Minnesota, which shot 53 percent in the first half, made only three of 14 shots in the period.

Tim Duncan added 19 points and 10 rebounds for San Antonio, and Tony Parker also scored 19 points.

Wally Szczerbiak had 22 for Minnesota, which dropped its fourth straight road game. Garnett scored 15 points on 4-for-16 shooting and had 10 rebounds, while Troy Hudson added 14 points. Michael Olowokandi had 12 rebounds.

Heat 109, Kings 107: At Sacramento, Calif., Dwyane Wade hit a three-pointer with 23.4 seconds left, and Shaquille O'Neal blocked Mike Bibby's layup attempt in the closing seconds of Miami's 10th straight victory.

Jones' dramatic shot and O'Neal's defense capped an impressive late rally.

O'Neal, who had 25 points and 10 rebounds despite a bruised left calf, missed two free throws with 10.9 seconds left, but blocked Bibby's ensuing drive to the hoop with about two seconds to play.

Chris Webber's three-pointer at the buzz-



Miami Heat's Dwyane Wade signals "three" after sinking a three-point shot to give the Heat a 109-107 win over the Sacramento Kings in Sacramento, Calif., on Thursday.

er was well short, and Miami extended its longest winning streak since late in the 1997-98 season.

The Heat also became just the third Eastern Conference team to win in Sacramento in 53 games over the last four seasons.

Webber scored 26 points and Bibby had 21 points and eight assists for the short-handed Kings, who nearly beat the East's best team despite playing largely without three of their top six players.

Shaq-A-Claus comes to Tinseltown

The Associated Press

LOS ANGELES — Shaq-A-Claus is still a big hit in Los Angeles.

Shaquille O'Neal played Santa Claus for 250 kids Friday morning at the Challengers Boys & Girls Club in South Los Angeles, a day before his first game since he was traded to the Miami Heat.

"I'm glad to be back here. I miss everybody," said O'Neal, wearing a black polo shirt, blue jeans and a red and white Santa's cap. "These kids are the future."

The NBA star bought many of the gifts himself during an early morning visit to the Toys-R-Us store in Santa Monica.

"He gives back a lot to us," said 16-year-old Dwayne Gibbons, who received a video game console. "He went back to Miami, but he didn't forget about us."

O'Neal downplayed his rivalry with former teammate Kobe Bryant.

"Hopefully I'll get a great reception (from the crowd)," O'Neal said. "But I know what's going to happen."

"I like Shaq better than Kobe," said 11-year-old Bennique Savannah, who received a karate mask. "I'm not going to give up on him even though he's on a different team. He's still my friend."

Briefs

Judge upheld an arbitrator's decision to reduce the forward's suspension for fighting with fans during the Nov. 19 Pacers-Pistons brawl.

Judge George B. Daniels ruled from the bench Thursday after listening to arguments by lawyers for the NBA and the players' union and watching a brief videotape of O'Neal punching a fan during the brawl.

The union asked Daniels to temporarily uphold an arbitrator's decision Wednesday to knock 10 games off a 25-game suspension imposed on O'Neal by NBA Commissioner David Stern. Ron Artest's season-long suspension and the suspensions of two other Indiana players were upheld.

Daniels said he ruled in O'Neal's favor before deciding the merits of the case because to make the player serve a punishment that may not be upheld could have "irreversible consequences for the player, the team, the player's future and the league itself."

O'Neal, a three-time All-Star and eight-year veteran, is now eligible to return Saturday when the Pistons host the Pacers in the teams' first matchup since the most violent melees in NBA history. Even before the suspension reduction was upheld, Indiana coach Rick Carlisle said O'Neal would start against Detroit.

Thursday's arguments focused on whether the fight with fans was considered on-the-court activity solely under Stern's disciplinary control or something else that would permit an arbitrator to review the penalty.

The judge felt that issue and others to be decided when he hears arguments next Thursday.

Butler suspended for punch

NEW YORK — Los Angeles Lakers forward Caron Butler received a one-game suspension from the NBA on Thursday for punching New Orleans guard Dan Dickau in the stomach.

Butler was ejected from Wednesday night's game against the Hornets when he took a swing at Dickau after being tripped. The trip didn't appear to be intentional.

Butler denied trying to punch Dickau and said he didn't believe he'd receive a suspension.

"It was just a natural reaction to pull him off my leg," Butler said. "That was it. I've known Dan for a while, he's a cool dude."

Dickau said he didn't know why Butler got ejected. "It was no big deal," Dickau said. "I kind of got into a crease and didn't make the right decision and we kind of got tangled up. I think my arm must have gotten wrapped around his leg a little bit and he must have thought that I was trying to do something a little more than what I did, obviously. It's too bad he got suspended. It wasn't anything intentional."

NBA scoreboard

Eastern Conference

Atlantic Division			
W	L	Pct	GB
1	12	48.0	1/2
2	14	42.9	1 1/2
3	16	37.5	2 1/2
4	18	32.1	3 1/2

5	20	26.9	4 1/2
6	22	21.6	5 1/2
7	24	16.3	6 1/2
8	26	11.0	7 1/2

Southeast Division			
W	L	Pct	GB
1	10	60.0	4 1/2
2	12	50.0	2
3	14	40.0	1 1/2
4	16	30.0	1/2

Central Division			
W	L	Pct	GB
1	15	57.7	—
2	17	50.0	2
3	19	42.3	4
4	21	34.6	6

Northwest Division			
W	L	Pct	GB
1	12	50.0	—
2	14	42.9	2
3	16	35.7	4
4	18	28.6	6

Pacific Division			
W	L	Pct	GB
1	13	50.0	—
2	15	42.9	2
3	17	35.7	4
4	19	28.6	6

Western Conference			
W	L	Pct	GB
1	13	50.0	—
2	15	42.9	2
3	17	35.7	4
4	19	28.6	6

Southwest Division			
W	L	Pct	GB
1	13	50.0	—
2	15	42.9	2
3	17	35.7	4
4	19	28.6	6

Midwest Division			
W	L	Pct	GB
1	13	50.0	—
2	15	42.9	2
3	17	35.7	4
4	19	28.6	6

North Division			
W	L	Pct	GB
1	13	50.0	—
2	15	42.9	2
3	17	35.7	4
4	19	28.6	6

South Division			
W	L	Pct	GB
1	13	50.0	—
2	15	42.9	2
3	17	35.7	4
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4	18	28.6	6

Pacific Division			
W	L	Pct	GB
1	13	50.0	—
2	15	42.9	2
3	17	35.7	4
4	19	28.6	6

Western Conference			
W	L	Pct	GB
1	13	50.0	—
2	15	42.9	2
3	17	35.7	4
4	19	28.6	6

Southwest Division			
W	L	Pct	GB
1	13	50.0	—
2	15	42.9	2
3	17	35.7	4
4	19	28.6	6

Midwest Division			
W	L	Pct	GB
1	13	50.0	—
2	15	42.9	2
3	17	35.7	4
4	19	28.6	6

North Division			
W	L	Pct	GB
1	13	50.0	—
2	15	42.9	2
3	17	35.7	4
4	19	28.6	6

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3	14	40.0	1 1/2
4	16	30.0	1/2

Ex-Texas manager Oates dies at age 58

The Associated Press

RICHMOND, Va. — After Johnny Oates was diagnosed with a brain tumor in 2001, he made a commitment to live each day to its utmost.

Knowing his time was short motivated Oates to climb out of bed, even if it was just to see squirrels in the backyard or feel the sun warming his face.

Oates died Friday at the Virginia Commonwealth University Medical Center, his wife and brother at his side, his son said. He was 58. "He was very comfortable. He went very peacefully," Andrew Oates, 28, said.

"I have learned more from him in the last three years than I did in the first 25. I think he's accomplished more in the last three years and touched more people in the last three years."

Oates was best known for managing the Texas Rangers to their first three postseason appearances, in 1996, '98 and '99. He resigned early in the 2001 season after the team lost 17 of its first 28 games despite the offseason addition of \$252 million free agent shortstop Alex Rodriguez.

For Oates, the diagnosis of the aggressive tumor glioblastoma multiforme helped him to focus on the things that mattered most to him, primarily his family.

"When you look at it, it's a blessing," he said in a March 2003 interview with The Associated Press at his home near Richmond. "Really there's only one day of the week that has any importance, and that's today. You can't do anything about yesterday and you can't do anything about tomorrow. It's just today."

Oates shared the American League Manager of the Year award with New York's Joe Torre in 1996, and also managed the Baltimore Orioles from 1991-94.

Oates had a regular season record of 797-746 and got his only postseason victory in 10 tries when the Rangers made their playoff debut, winning 6-2 at Yankee Stadium on Oct. 1, 1996. Texas lost the next three games and was swept by the Yankees in 1998 and 1999.

Oates, a left-handed hitting catcher, played for five teams in his major league career, starting with the Orioles in 1970. For four years, Oates hit .257 with 14 homers and 126 runs batted in.

A funeral was scheduled Tuesday.

Three major umpires to regain jobs

NEW YORK — Bob Davidson spent last season umpiring in the Class A Midwest League, where he made just \$13,000 a year, on the road from April 4 to Sept. 20 and missed daughter Andrea's graduation from Colorado State.

Johnny Oates

Next year, he's likely to be back in the major leagues, making \$74,993.

Davidson is among three umpires who will be rehired by major league baseball as part of a settlement of the nasty dispute that cost 22 umpires their jobs in 1999. Six more will split \$2.3 million in severance pay.

The umpires will be brought back as part of a new five-year labor contract that was agreed to Wednesday, a deal that also settles the 1½-year old grievance umpires filed over a computer system baseball has used to evaluate plate umpires.

Davidson, a 52-year-old veteran of 18 major league seasons, worked behind the plate in 77 games last season.

Tom Hallion and Ed Hickox, who also have been umpiring in the minors, will get two of the first five vacancies. That would increase the number of rehired umpires to 11, half the total who lost their jobs when a mass resignation strategy backfired in September 1999.

Six umpires will receive severance pay and health benefits ranging from \$325,000 to \$400,000. Still to be resolved is back pay for five umpires rehired as part of a partial settlement in 2002. A federal appeals court ruled Gary Darling, Bill Hohn, Larry Poncierno, Larry Vanover and Joe West were entitled to the money, but baseball has asked the U.S. Supreme Court to review the case.

Vazquez says Yankees would regret trading him

PONCE, Puerto Rico — Javier Vazquez says the New York Yankees would be making a mistake if they trade him.

A proposed three-team deal that would send Vazquez to Los Angeles, Randy Johnson from Arizona to the Yankees and Shawn Green from the Dodgers to the Diamondbacks collapsed earlier this week when Los Angeles changed its mind.

"I'm disappointed that the Yankees are not willing to trade Vazquez for having only a bad second half to the season," Vazquez was quoted as saying in Friday's editions of La Perla del Sur.

"I've had four consistent seasons in the major leagues, and for one bad second half it's unfair that they would trade me," Vazquez said. "I still trust in my abilities, and if the Yankees trade me, they will regret it."

Vazquez, 28, went 14-9 with a 4.75 ERA, while making the All-Star team for the first time. He was just one of his last nine regular-season starts.

Varitek signs with Sox; selected team captain

BY JIMMY GOLEN
The Associated Press

BOSTON — Jason Varitek doesn't expect to hit like Carl Yastrzemski or Jim Rice. When it comes to clubhouse leadership, though, he is every bit their equal.

The Boston Red Sox appointed Varitek their third captain since 1923 after giving their longtime catcher a \$40 million, four-year contract. Varitek did not know of the honor until he was presented with home and road jerseys bearing a red "C" on Friday to formalize the leadership role he has grown into since joining the team in 1997.

"It's not every day you're lucky enough to sign a player who embodies everything you want your franchise to be," general manager Theo Epstein said. "When you get that player, you don't let him get away."

Rice was the last official Red Sox captain, serving from 1985 until he retired in 1989. "Captain Carl" held the role in 1966 and again from 1969 to 1983.

Rice and Yastrzemski were batting stars who earned the honor by virtue of their stardom. Varitek is a potent offensive player, but what sets him apart is his handling of the pitching staff and his presence in the clubhouse.

"I'm extremely honored right now," Varitek said. "If I can do half of what they did statistically, I'll be all right."

Other players have been considered captains informally through the years, like Varitek was until this week.

"We're not asking Jason to change at all by giving him that captaincy," Epstein said. "It's just a recognition of something everybody knows."

Tom Wakefield said he knows Varitek's value despite working almost exclusively with backup catcher Doug Mirabeli.

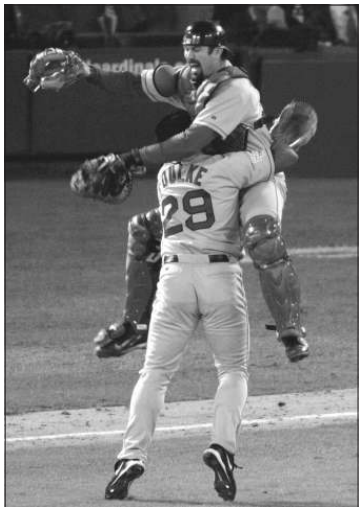
"He's really the glue that holds the whole team together," Wakefield said.

Varitek originally sought a five-year deal worth \$55 million with a no-trade clause that would have guaranteed him the chance to stay in Boston until he was 37. But rather than seek all offers, he told agent Scott Boras to deal with the Red Sox first.

"Jason and (wife) Karen told me specifically that my job is to sit down and talk with Theo," Boras said.

"I honestly couldn't see him playing in another city," Karen Varitek said. "I just don't think he would fit anywhere else."

Varitek is expected to be the last of the free agents signed by the Red Sox, who have already added shortstop Edgar Renteria and pitchers David Wells, Matt Clement, Wade Miller, John Halama and Matt Mantei to the team that won the franchise's first



Catcher Jason Varitek leaps into the arms of reliever Keith Foulke to celebrate Boston's World Series triumph over St. Louis. After helping the Red Sox to their first championship since 1918, Varitek was signed to a four-year, \$40 million contract and was designated team captain.

World Series championship since 1918.

The Red Sox entered the 2004 season with four major players heading for free agency: Pedro Martinez, Nomar Garciaparra, Derek Lowe and Varitek.

Garciaparra was traded to the Chicago Cubs in July. Martinez signed with the New York Mets this month and the Red Sox did pursue Lowe as a free agent. That means they will keep just one of the Big Four, but he's the most important one.

"In our minds, he was the guy that we kind of couldn't live without," Epstein said. "There weren't any real alternatives. Jason's kind of the heart and soul of the Red Sox."

The Red Sox had considered reloading last winter rather than letting the free agents walk and getting nothing in return. But Epstein opted to keep the core together and Boston won its first World Series since 1918.

"The transition worked out as well as it possibly could," Epstein said. "We kept everyone because we thought we had a real chance to win, and that was realized."

Varitek hit a career-high .296 with 18 homers and 73 RBIs last season. Since his trade from Seat-

tle in 1997, he has a .271 batting average with 97 homers and 418 RBIs in 832 games.

Varitek will receive a \$4 million signing bonus paid over four years and annual salaries of \$9 million against no-trade clauses, so the sides came up with a creative compromise.

Varitek will get no-trade rights once he has spent eight consecutive years with the team. Four other Red Sox players, including Manny Ramirez, have contracts that entitle them to no-trade clauses that match those of their teammates; none of them would reach that milestone in their current deals.

"We felt that loyalty should be rewarded. That's good policy," Epstein said. "The no-trade clause protection was the most difficult part of the negotiations."

Now that he's signed, Varitek has a busy winter ahead. A studious preparer, he has a half-dozen new pitchers to familiarize himself with: starters Miller, Clement and Wells, swingman Halama and reliever Mantei, with one spot left to be filled.

"The biggest thing is winning. To do it the first year — we all know how long it took," Varitek said. "Hopefully, we have a foundation big enough to do it again."

Rivals Steelers, Ravens surprisingly silent

Typical trash talk nonexistent as foes focus on 'The Game'

BY ALAN ROBINSON

The Associated Press

PITTSBURGH — The pregame talk was unusually subdued for two teams that mutually love nothing better than to chatter about each other. Maybe it's because the importance of this game speaks for itself.

For the first time since the former Cleveland Browns moved to Baltimore for the 1996 season, the Ravens meet their biggest rivals Sunday in a late-December game that truly matters. As Ravens coach Brian Billicek said, every Ravens-Steelers game means something no matter the time or the setting, but what's at stake in this game is evident.

For the Ravens, it could mean their entire season. For the Steelers, it could mean the entire postseason.

That's why, even though the Steelers effectively scored a playoff spot weeks ago, running back Jerome Bettis said, "This is The Game. This is our biggest game of the season."

The Ravens (8-6) are one of four teams tied for the AFC's last wild-card spot and badly need to win after losing three of four. The Steelers (13-1) locked up the AFC North on Dec. 12, but can secure a first-round bye and home-field advantage throughout the AFC playoffs by running their franchise-record winning streak to 13 games.

"And what better way to get that than by beating the Ravens?" wide receiver Hines Ward asked.

The Steelers have incentives beyond the obvious, most notably to beat the team that dealt them their only defeat, 30-13 on Sept. 19.

Quarterback Tommy Maddox injured an elbow early in the third quarter with the Ravens up big, forcing rookie Ben Roethlis-



NEWSDAY/RT

Antwan Randle El of the Steelers scores a touchdown against the New York Giants on Dec. 18. The Steelers take on rival Baltimore with a first-round bye and home-field advantage throughout the playoffs at stake. The Ravens need a win to help secure a berth.

berger to take over. No other Steelers QB has taken a snap in the 12 games — and 12 victories — since that have followed.

"It's a total different makeup of this team from the first time we played them to now," Ward said. "So we're looking forward to it."

Not surprisingly, so are the Ravens, who have beaten Pittsburgh two straight. Roethlisberger seemingly plays with an 'S' on his chest, enjoying the best record of any NFL rookie quarterback ever, yet the Ravens think they've got the answer.

"We're Pittsburgh's Kryptonite," Terrell Suggs said. "Some teams just can't beat us: Pittsburgh, Denver, Jacksonville. I'm not afraid of their offense one bit."

The Steelers did win four in a row without scoring more than 19 points in any game from Nov. 21-Dec. 12, but Roethlis-

berger passed for a career-high 316 yards while leading his fourth final-quarter comeback victory in 12 starts Dec. 18 against the Giants.

Despite Suggs' words, the teams' pregame banter never became all that heated. Steelers receiver Plaxico Burress suggests neither team wants to give the other any more incentive.

"I would pretty much say it's a rivalry of hate," said Burress, who hopes to play after missing four games with a sore hamstring. "I don't think there are a too many friends on either sideline. They don't like us and we don't like them. Their fans don't like us and our fans don't like them."

Not even Ravens coach Brian Billicek could bait Steelers linebacker Joey Porter into accelerating his normally voluninous word count. Porter angered the Ravens by shoving a wobbly, defenseless Todd Heap



during the Sept. 19 game, and Heap missed nine games with a badly sprained ankle.

Heap was already injured at the time. "That was what it was, and I don't know that our guys are particularly focused on it. The fact that Todd Heap missed the ensuing 10 weeks or so, I don't know that anybody has dwelled on that," Billicek said, his words tinged with sarcasm.

Normally, Porter would respond with some pointed words, but was low-key this time — perhaps because Steelers coach Bill Cowher said Porter often becomes too distracted by events other than the game.

"I'm just concentrating on getting this game won because it's a game we definitely need to win," said Porter, one of the Steelers' AFC-high six Pro Bowl picks. "The sideshow stuff, that's way behind me. If they're still mad about the Todd Heap thing, that's something they can deal with."

What Steelers are dealing with is a worrisome and ever-growing list of injuries that threaten to leave them short-handed for the playoffs. Running back Duce Staley (hamstring) probably will miss his sixth game in eight weeks. Linebacker Clark Haggans (groin) also won't play. Cornerback Chad Scott (knee) has missed eight games and linebacker Kendrick Bell (groin) played in only two games.

The Ravens aren't entirely healthy, either. Running back Jamal Lewis aggravated an ankle injury while running for 130 yards in a Mike Mularkey said after a diagnosis, though he is expected to play.

Huizenga, Dolphins still courting LSU coach Saban

The Associated Press

MIAMI — Miami Dolphins owner Wayne Huizenga's private plane was ready to leave Baton Rouge, La., when LSU coach Nick Saban boarded briefly, then got in his car and drove off.

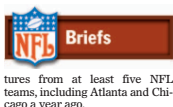
Huizenga returned to South Florida without Saban on Friday, but the coach might yet join the Dolphins.

Still weighing an offer the Dolphins made Wednesday, Saban met with Huizenga and team president Eddie Jones, then huddled with LSU athletic director Skip Bertman, then said he needed more time.

"In the next 24 to 48 hours we'll make a decision," Saban said in a statement released by the school. "We certainly appreciate everyone's support, patience and understanding during this very difficult process."

While the Tigers were scheduled to fly Saturday to Orlando for their Jan. 1 bowl game against Iowa, the question remained whether Saban would be headed.

His hesitancy in making the leap to the NFL is nothing new. He previously turned down over-



tures from at least five NFL teams, including Atlanta and Chicago a year ago.

"This is a gut-wrenching decision for Nick," Bertman said in a statement. "He needs, and deserves, the time necessary to make the right decision for him and his family."

Huizenga, a billionaire businessman renowned for his ability to close a deal, arrived in Baton Rouge by private plane at 7 a.m. to make another pitch. He and Jones met with Saban at the coach's house. Saban then went to the athletic department offices to confer for more than two hours with his agent and Bertman.

Emerging from that meeting, Saban offered no hint that he'd made a decision.

It was unclear whether money was part of the negotiations. Saban is the highest-paid coach in college football and in the first year of an \$18.45 million,

seven-year deal, while the Dolphins' offer is believed to exceed \$4 million a year.

The job description is not believed to be an issue. Huizenga has offered Saban full authority over the football operation. Because of Huizenga's reputation as a hands-off owner, the Dolphins' job has special appeal even though they're 3-11 — their first losing season since 1988.

But the owner found himself stymied yet again, at least temporarily, in his attempts to upgrade the Dolphins. Last January he hired as senior vice president Dan Marino, who had a change of heart and resigned 22 days later.

Many Miami players lobbied for Huizenga to keep Jim Bates, who is 2-3 since taking over as interim coach. The Dolphins prefer for the possibility that Saban will take over in early January.

With all attention on the coaching search, the Dolphins will play Cleveland on Sunday night — a not-ready-for-prime-time game between last-place teams.

"We're focused," Bates said, "and we're going to play lights out."

Ex-Raider Robbins arrested

SAN FRANCISCO — Former Pro Bowl center Barry Robbins was arrested Friday for hitting a security guard at a night club.

The ex-Akron Raiders lineman was arrested about 7 a.m. after he was told the bar he was trying to enter was closed, according to the San Francisco Sheriff's Department. Robbins was charged with battery and drunk and disorderly conduct. He was still in jail Friday evening, held on \$1,000 bond.

Often troubled, Robbins is best remembered for disappearing the night before the 2003 Super Bowl in San Diego. He spent Super Bowl Sunday in a hospital and later acknowledged that he had stopped taking his medicine for depression and bipolar disorder. The Raiders lost 48-21 to Tampa Bay.

Robbins was released by Oakland in July, a week after he and two other players were fined three game checks for testing positive for the steroid THG.

McGeeha a gametime decision
ORCHARD PARK, N.Y. —

Bills running back Willis McGeeha practiced for the first time this week, and his status is unclear for Sunday's game at San Francisco.

McGeeha is listed as questionable after bruising and hyperextending his right knee in Buffalo's win over Cincinnati last Sunday. Coach Mike Mularkey said after Friday's workout that McGeeha's availability will be a game-time decision.

Backup Travis Henry ruled himself out of Sunday's game because of torn ligaments in his right ankle that forced him to miss the last three games.

Third-stringer Shad Williams, an undrafted rookie free agent, is expected to start if McGeeha can't play. Joe Burns, primarily a blocking back, and Dante Brown, whom the Bills acquired Wednesday off Cleveland's practice squad, would back up Williams.

McGeeha has started nine games this season, with the Bills going 8-1 in those starts. Buffalo is also undefeated (6-0) when he runs for 100 yards. McGeeha has helped lead the Bills (8-6) into the thick of the AFC wild-card race after an 0-4 start.

NFL scoreboard

American Conference

East	W	L	Pct	PF	PA
x-New England	12	0	.953	359	202
N.Y. Jets	10	0	.714	297	206
Buffalo	8	0	.571	230	248
Miami	7	1	.04	242	317
South	W	L	Pct	PF	PA
x-Indianapolis	10	0	.786	474	287
Jacksonville	8	0	.571	248	253
Houston	7	0	.429	274	317
Tennessee	4	10	.286	304	383
North	W	L	Pct	PF	PA
x-Pittsburgh	13	0	.929	323	220
Baltimore	8	0	.571	280	225
Cincinnati	6	0	.429	313	340
Cleveland	6	0	.214	247	356
West	W	L	Pct	PF	PA
x-San Diego	10	0	.786	391	261
Denver	8	0	.571	311	274
Kansas City	6	0	.429	305	361
Oakland	5	0	.357	284	383

National Conference

East	W	L	Pct	PF	PA
xy-Philadelphia	11	0	.893	308	202
N.Y. Giants	9	0	.357	253	300
Dallas	9	0	.357	256	367
Washington	5	0	.357	209	234
South	W	L	Pct	PF	PA
x-Arizona	11	0	.786	301	283
Carolina	9	0	.643	380	288
New Orleans	6	0	.429	301	374
Tampa Bay	6	0	.214	277	325
North	W	L	Pct	PF	PA
x-Green Bay	10	0	.690	363	366
Minnesota	8	0	.533	387	274
Detroit	5	0	.357	258	313
Chicago	5	0	.357	304	381
West	W	L	Pct	PF	PA
Seattle	7	0	.500	319	310
St. Louis	6	0	.429	367	356
San Francisco	5	0	.357	351	351
San Francisco	2	10	.143	245	390

y-clinched conference

Friday game

Green Bay 34, Minnesota 31

Sunday's games

Oakland at Tennessee

Denver at Kansas City

Sunday's games

Chicago at Detroit

San Diego at Indianapolis

Baltimore at Pittsburgh

N.Y. Jets at St. Louis

Cleveland at Cincinnati

Atlanta at New Orleans

Buffalo at San Francisco

N.Y. Giants at N.Y. Jets

Arizona at Seattle

Atlanta at Tampa Bay

Cleveland at Dallas

Monday's game

Philadelphia at St. Louis

Sunday, Jan. 2

Detroit at Tennessee

Miami at Baltimore

Green Bay at Chicago

N.Y. Jets at St. Louis

Cleveland at Houston

Atlanta at Washington

Pittsburgh at Carolina

New Orleans at Carolina

San Francisco at New England

Cincinnati at Philadelphia

Atlanta at Seattle

Tampa Bay at Arizona

Kansas City at San Diego

Jacksonville at Denver

Oakland at Dallas

Dallas at N.Y. Giants

End Regular Season

Friday

Packers 34, Vikings 31

Green Bay 0 17 7-10-34

Minnesota 0 21 10-11-23

Second Quarter

Min.—Moss 12 pass from Culpepper (Anderson kick), 14:05.

GB—Green 1 run (Longwell kick), 6:37.

Min.—Burstein 68 pass from Culpepper (Anderson kick), 6:15.

GB—Franklin 22 pass from Favre (Longwell kick), 1:17.

Min.—Linnert 38 pass from Culpepper (Anderson kick), 3:06.

GB—FG Longwell 42-20.

Third Quarter

GB—Walker 9 pass from Favre (Longwell kick), 7:41.

Fourth Quarter

Min.—FG Anderson 25, 14:57.

Min.—Claborn 15 interception return (Anderson kick), 8:18.

GB—Driver 3 pass from Favre (Longwell kick), 5:34.

GB—FG Longwell 29, 3:00.

Min.—FG Longwell 29, 3:00.

Min.—FG Longwell 29, 3:00.

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Another comeback for Favre

Green Bay rallies past Vikings, clinches NFC North title

By Dave CAMPBELL

The Associated Press

MINNEAPOLIS — After nearly costing Green Bay a crucial game with one of his familiar mistakes, Brett Favre rallied the Packers to victory — and the NFC North title — with one of his famous comebacks.

Favre led a 76-yard drive to set up Ryan Longwell's game-ending 29-yard field goal in the Packers' 34-31 victory over the Minnesota Vikings on Friday.

"That drive right there — it's sort of what our season's been all about," Favre said. "We've had ups and downs, but we found a way to endure."

The Packers (9-6) trailed 31-24 with 4:18 left after Favre's third-down throw from the end zone was intercepted by Chris Claiborne and returned 15 yards for a touchdown.

The Vikings (8-7), though, couldn't get what they needed from a pass defense that has struggled all season. Donald Driver — who had 11 receptions for 162 yards — made a nifty, tie-die down catch on Favre's pass on fourth-and-goal from the 3 to tie it at 31 with 3:34 remaining after an 80-yard drive.

"We needed one more play somewhere, and we just didn't do



Green Bay Packers QB Brett Favre (30-47-43, 365 yards, 3 TDs) had an interception returned for a touchdown in the fourth quarter Friday but led the Packers on an 80-yard drive to tie the game. Green Bay won 34-31.

it." Minnesota center Matt Birk said.

"It's a disappointing loss, but there is a tomorrow and we're still very much in the hunt."

Minnesota, which can clinch a wild-card playoff spot with a loss

by Carolina or St. Louis this week-end, appeared on its way to re-taking the lead. But a holding penalty on Birk — the Vikings were flagged nine times for 78 yards — wiped out a 16-yard run by Michael Bennett that would have given them the ball at the Green Bay 40 just before the 2-minute warning.

"When we watch film, we're going to kick ourselves," said Daunte Culpepper, who went 16-for-23 for 285 yards, no touchdowns and three touchdowns — on three consecutive passes in a wild second quarter in which 58 points were scored.

After a punt, Favre got the ball at his 13 with 1:35 left.

Twelve plays later, Longwell's kick sailed through the uprights to give the Packers their third straight division title.

Favre finished 30-for-43 for 365 yards, three touchdowns and the interception. Ahman Green, who left briefly with a head injury, carried 19 times for 64 yards and a score. Jason Walker and Bubba Franks also had receiving touchdowns.

Nate Burleson, who had a career day against the Packers last month, caught two passes for 110 yards and a score. Randy Moss had a touchdown among his two catches and 30 yards, and Bennett finished with a touchdown and 159 total yards on 20 touches.

The game got crazy late in the second quarter. After a 55-yard kickoff return by Kelly Campbell, Culpepper promptly threw a screen pass to Bennett for a 38-yard score to make it 21-14 with 1:08 remaining.

Antonio Chatman answered with a 59-yard kickoff return, giving Longwell a chance to make a 42-yard field goal as the half ended. A livid Vikings coach Mike Tice chucked his clipboard and pencil to the turf when an official clock stoppage for a measurement allowed Green Bay time to gather on fourth-and-1 for the kick with 4 seconds left.

Those three points proved to be the winning margin.

"I didn't quite understand the logic behind calling them a time-out for measurement when the clock was running, they were out of timeouts," Tice said. "What were they measuring for? To go for a field goal?"

If the Packers win at Chicago next week — they're 5-2 on the road — they'll secure the No. 3 seed for the playoffs. They're already guaranteed a first-round home game.

"At 1-4, I don't think many people thought we'd win the division," Favre said.

"This team has battled all year, and today was no different."

Prove: Pats have won three straight again

PROVE, FROM BACK PAGE

At issue: Pennington was upset at the perception he has not won big games in his career. The Jets are 0-2 against Pittsburgh and New England this season, having scored a combined 13 points. A victory over the Patriots would go a long way to showing the Jets — and their quarterback — belong among the elite.

"I love playing in big games," Pennington said. "The fact of the matter is in games that people call 'big,' I have lost the last two. To me, in the NFL we take it for granted. Does the Miami and New England game look big now? It is pretty big to them because they lost a chance at home-field advantage and now they are struggling to get it back."

The Jets are the ones that usually struggle against the Patriots. New England has won three straight and five of the last six, though the last three victories have been close. That is no consolation to the Jets, who want to beat their division rival.

Badly.

"I'm infinitely time for us to stand up and say you can't let getting your big brother beat you around," Jets defensive tackle Jason Ferguson said. "They're an elite team. We need to prove to everybody we can beat an elite team so we can make a move in the playoffs."

Or as running back Curtis Mar-



New York Jets running back Curtis Martin rushed for 134 yards and two touchdowns as the Jets beat the Seahawks 37-14 last week.

tin said. "It gets on your nerves. It's something you feel a need to overcome."

Brady is 5-1 against the Jets as a starter; his lone loss came in 2002. Pennington was terrific in that 30-17 victory, which handed the Patriots their second loss in a row — the last time they dropped two straight.

Pennington threw for three touchdowns and no interceptions to help the Jets keep their momentum going and eventually earn a playoff berth. The Jets followed that win with others against Green Bay and Indianapolis, the last time they made the postseason.

Earlier this season, Pennington had a chance to help the Jets win at Foxboro. But his fourth-down pass with time winding down was thrown into double coverage for Wayne Chrebet and went incomplete.

Still, New York is the only team to hold the Patriots under 20 points this season.

Whatever happens Sunday could determine the fate of both teams in the postseason.

"For us to win a game like this, it does a lot of things for you," Jets coach Herman Edwards said. "A lot of good things can happen if you can beat a team like this."

NFL playoff scenarios

NFC WEST

NFC EAST

New England has clinched division title.

New England has clinched first-round bye with: 1) A win OR 2) A tie and San Diego-Indianapolis tie.

New York Jets can clinch playoff berth with: 1) A win or tie, OR 2) Buffalo and Baltimore lose or tie, OR 3) Buffalo and Jacksonville lose or tie, OR 4) Baltimore, Denver and Jacksonville lose or tie, OR 5) Buffalo and Denver lose or tie, plus Baltimore clinches strength of victory over Jacksonville in this tiebreaker scenario.

NFC NORTH

Pittsburgh has clinched division title.

Pittsburgh can clinch homefield advantage throughout playoffs with: 1) A win and tie, or 2) New England ties or tie OR 3) New England loss and Indianapolis loss.

Pittsburgh can clinch first-round bye with: 1) A win or tie, OR 2) Indianapolis-San Diego tie, OR 3) New England and Indianapolis lose.

NFC SOUTH

Indianapolis has clinched division title.

Jacksonville can clinch playoff berth with: 1) Jacksonville win, plus Buffalo, Baltimore, Denver lose and Jacksonville clinches strength of victory over Denver over Buffalo, Baltimore and Denver.

San Diego has clinched division title.

Philadelphia has clinched division title with homefield advantage throughout the playoffs.

NFC NORTH

Green Bay has clinched division title.

Green Bay can clinch playoff berth with: 1) A win and St. Louis loss or tie, OR 2) A tie and St. Louis loss or tie, OR 3) St. Louis loss or tie, OR 4) Carolina loss or tie.

NFC SOUTH

Atlanta has clinched division title and a first-round bye.

Carolina can clinch playoff berth with: 1) A win and St. Louis loss or tie, OR 2) A tie and St. Louis loss or tie, OR 3) St. Louis loss or tie, OR 4) Carolina loss or tie.

NFC WEST

Seattle can clinch division title with: 1) A win and St. Louis loss or tie, OR 2) A tie and St. Louis loss or tie, OR 3) St. Louis loss or tie, OR 4) Carolina loss or tie.

Seattle can clinch playoff berth with: 1) A win and St. Louis loss or tie, OR 2) A tie and St. Louis loss or tie, OR 3) St. Louis loss or tie, OR 4) Carolina loss or tie.

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SPORTS



Chang finishes career at Hawaii
as first college quarterback
with 17,000 yards, Page 33

Pats, Jets have plenty to prove

New England still smarting from loss to Miami; N.Y. needs to win big game

BY ANDREA ADELSON
The Associated Press

EAST RUTHERFORD, N.J. — Tom Brady and the New England Patriots need to get over their meltdown in Miami, or the road back to the Super Bowl could get a lot longer.

The all-of-a-sudden downtrodden Patriots must rebound Sunday against the New York Jets, desperate for a playoff berth of their own, in the biggest game of the season for both teams.

With a victory, the Patriots (12-2) clinch a first-round bye. A loss, and getting a week off is no longer a guarantee. As for the Jets (10-4), a victory gets them a wild-card berth with a game to play, while giving them credibility for finally beating an upper-echelon team.

"We have a lot at stake because we want to win," Patriots linebacker Tedy Bruschi said. "We want to put the last game behind us and move on. Last week, we didn't play too well on the road. This is another road test for us. We want to play well."

The 29-28 loss to the lowly Dolphins made the Patriots seem, well, beatable. Brady tied a career high with four interceptions, including two in the final two minutes that helped Miami erase an 11-point deficit with four minutes remaining.

That ended a New England



AP

New England Patriots quarterback Tom Brady, who is 5-1 against the New York Jets as a starter, was intercepted four times in last week's 29-28 loss to the Miami Dolphins. The Patriots can clinch a first-round bye in the playoffs with a victory over the Jets on Sunday.

streak of 38 victories when leading after the third quarter. The Dolphins took advantage of the depleted Patriots secondary, and threw the winning touchdown over receiver/nickel back Troy Brown.

Brady knows he made some poor decisions in the game, and

hopes to avoid the same mistakes against the Jets. Same goes for his teammates.

"Part of playing this game is overcoming tough situations, overcoming adversity, and our team has faced that this week," Brady said. "We're going to see what we're made of. It's not like



AP

New York Jets QB Chad Pennington, who has lost to the Patriots and Steelers as a starter this season, would like to dispel the notion that he can't lead the Jets to victories in big games. A Jets victory would clinch a wild-card berth with a week remaining in the regular season.

every week you are coming out of these 50-point wins. There are weeks when you lose and you have to bounce back and hopefully it makes your team stronger."

Brady and the Patriots want to show their loss was a fluke.

Meanwhile, Chad Pennington and the Jets need to show their offensive bonanza in a 37-14 victory over Seattle last week was no

fluke. Especially Pennington.

The franchise quarterback had as much of a nightmare week as Brady. After refusing to answer questions following the victory over the Seahawks, Pennington berated the media with cameras rolling and took his fair share of criticism for his outburst.

SEE PROVE ON PAGE 39




New England Patriots at New York Jets

10 p.m. Sunday
AFN-Atlantic

Game time is Central European.

Red Sox catcher Varitek signs four-year, \$40 million deal, becomes third team captain since 1923

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Ravens, Steelers keeping talk unusually low-key as they prepare to square off in big game on Sunday

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Suns overcome sloppy defense to win 10th straight, continue best early-season run in NBA since 1995-96 Bulls

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No. 12 Huskies roll to lopsided win over Houston Page 35

